How one kid got a videogame job by being good...at videogames

ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

The # ogame Magazine

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GEARS of WAR

Multiplayer hands-on, vehicles, new screens... we've got the full scoop!

PS3 + Wii

How their crazy controllers will work with your games

Next-gen previews

Rainbow Six Vegas, Lair, DOA: Xtreme 2, and more

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Nov. 2006 ISSUE 209
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#1 of 2: The Human Curb Stomp Cover

Dirt God Commandments

Thou shall race all offroading vehicles:
ATVs, bikes, buggies and trophy trucks.

Thou shall do sick freestyle tricks off jumps.

Thou shall not mud pants while getting big air.

Thou shall customize vehicle to make faster.

Thou shall race in all terrain: snow, dirt, sand,
forest and especially mud.

Thou shall not wash ATV unless thou washes it with mud.

Thou shall strive to become a pro racer.

Thou shall feed on adrenaline for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

**Thou shall honor all commandments
of the Dirt Gods or feel their wrath.**

ATV Offroad Fury® 4. Now race with MX bikes, buggies and trophy trucks on over 70 new tracks. Live the life of a rookie rider in Story Mode, and customize your own tracks with Track Editor. The Dirt Gods are pleased.

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Mild Violence

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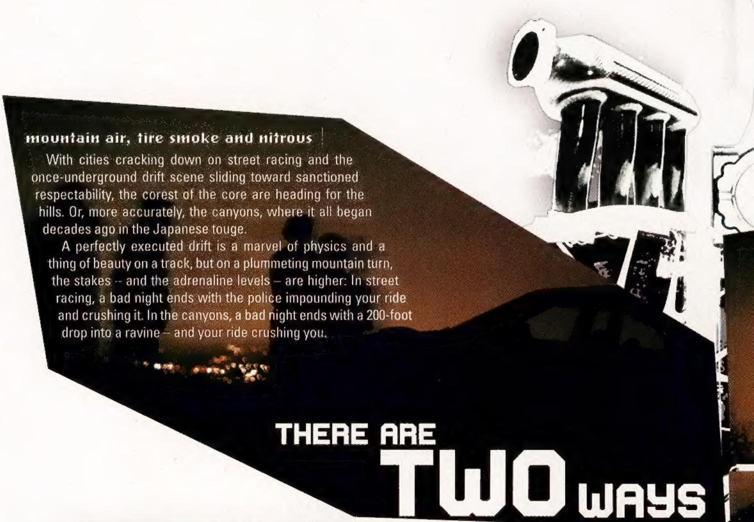


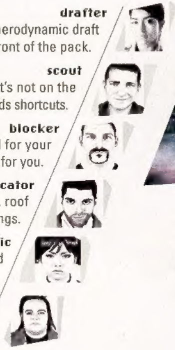
mountain air, tire smoke and nitrous

With cities cracking down on street racing and the once-underground drift scene sliding toward sanctioned respectability, the corest of the core are heading for the hills. Or, more accurately, the canyons, where it all began decades ago in the Japanese touge.

A perfectly executed drift is a marvel of physics and a thing of beauty on a track, but on a plummeting mountain turn, the stakes – and the adrenaline levels – are higher. In street racing, a bad night ends with the police impounding your ride and crushing it. In the canyons, a bad night ends with a 200-foot drop into a ravine – and your ride crushing you.

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO GET

crews Raw skill wins races. Recruiting a rock-solid crew paves the road to world domination.



drafter
Purist. Team player. Creates the aerodynamic draft that slingshots you to the front of the pack.

scout
Knows the map – and what's not on the map. Sees around corners. Finds shortcuts.

blocker
Rough. Aggro. Makes life hell for your opponent. Opens the road wide for you.

fabricator
Master of mods – adds body panels, roof scoops, tall wheels, exhaust kits, wings.

mechanic
Has skills to boost your ride's juice and connections to get discounts on cars and parts.

fixer
Keeps the heat off your back – and gets you extra money when you win races.

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TITLE

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

FACTOID: 91,000 car paints in game

INFORMATION
www.nfscarbon.com

DEVELOPMENT START
01 | 03 | 05

DATE OF RELEASE
11 | 01 | 06

primer, bolts and welding burns

Like a lot of us, Andy Blackmore draws cars – except he does it really, really well. Blackmore, a designer at the EA Black Box studio in Vancouver who once worked for McLaren, spends his days putting down incredibly detailed visions of American muscle, tuner imports and exotics – freehand, no less. In Need For Speed Carbon, Blackmore has added 200 new works of art to the game's lineup.

In the Need For Speed Carbon shop, players who love to get their hands dirty can use the revolutionary new Autosculpt™ toolkit to tweak body shapes, hoods, intakes, vents and every other detail of the masterpieces created by Blackmore and fellow designer Mike Hayes. Or they can build eye-popping whips of their own. The best part of working in the digital realm, as Blackmore puts it: "In the real world, you have to worry about legality."

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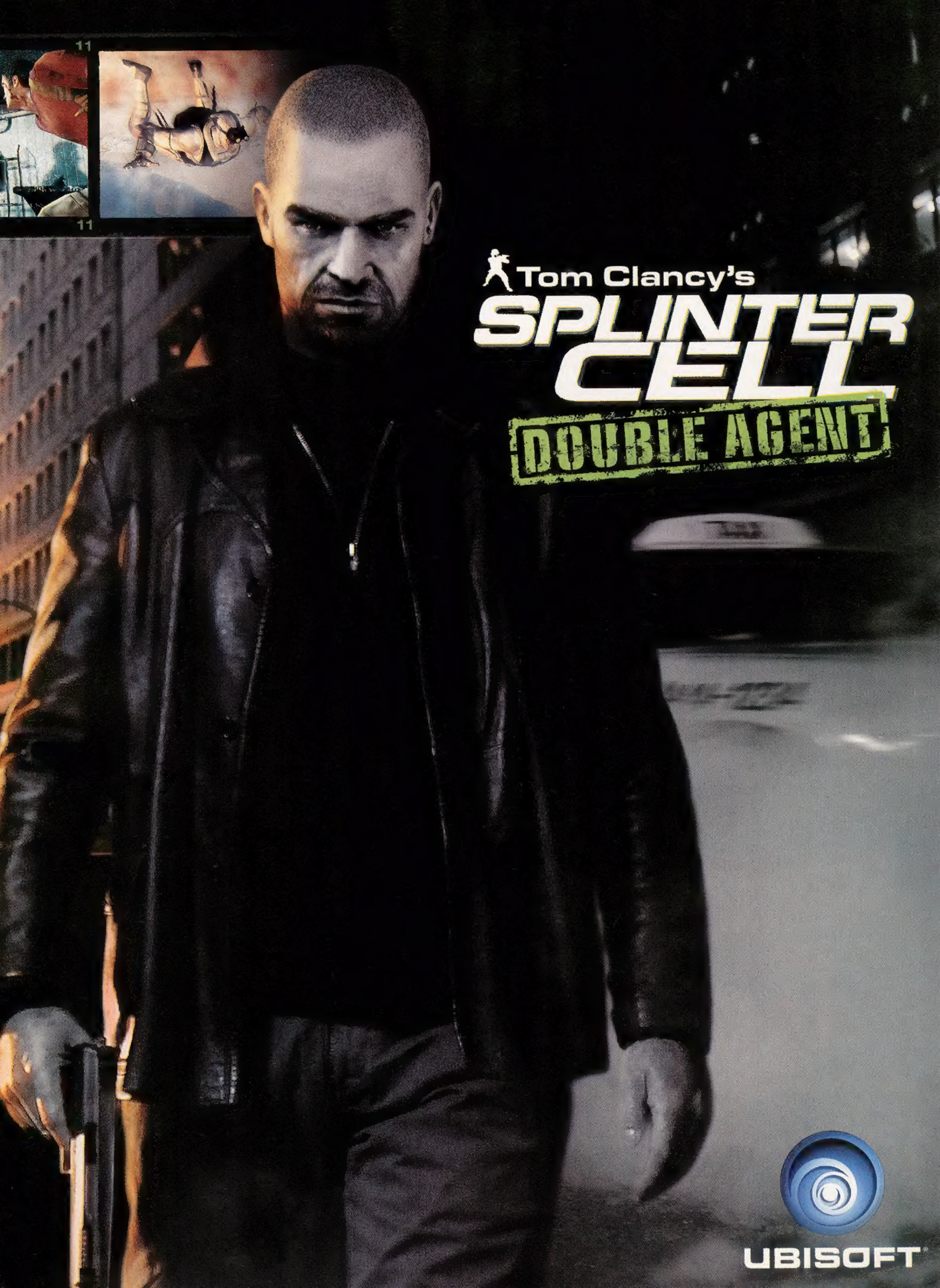
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–PSM: Independent PlayStation Magazine, August 2006

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Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol

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Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes

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GRAB HOLD.
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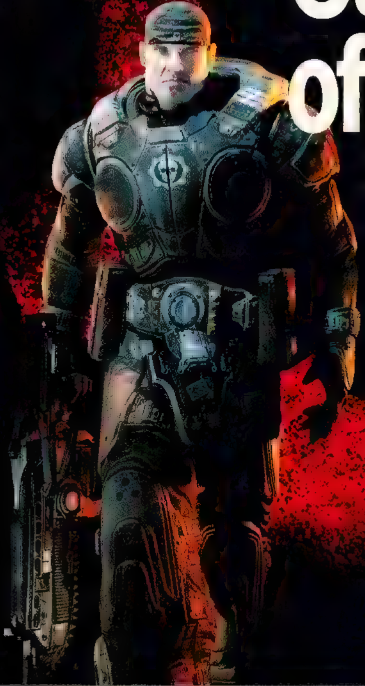

Well in advance of this Xbox 360 shooter's November 12th "Emergence Day," we spend 24 hours in the trenches with *Gears of War* creators Epic to craft this 14-page war journal about the game's single-player campaign, online modes...and orbital lasers?

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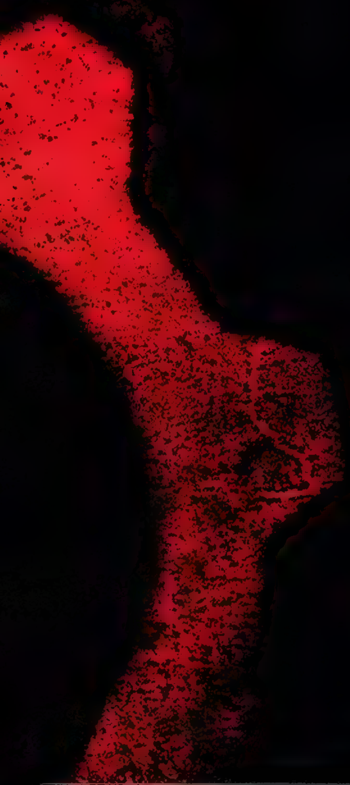

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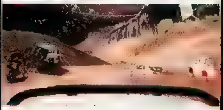

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EDITORIAL

Do me a favor—turn to pg. 96 and read the *Gears of War* cover story. When you're finished, turn to pg. 156 to see what we have lined up for next issue.

Why all the Xbox 360 love? Well, we're genuinely excited about what we've played so far of *Gears of War* (regular readers know we'll offer our honest opinions, good or bad, on prerelease games if we get our hands on them). And *Halo 3*...well, it's *Halo 3*. But in case you're questioning why we've had so many Microsoft first-party games on our covers this year (*Halo 3* will be No. 4), lemme explain....

First off, with our shift to more next-gen reporting, the Xbox 360 is obviously ahead of the curve compared to the Wii and the PS3, which aren't out yet. Thus, more 360 coverage is to be expected for this year. But the bigger thing is, Microsoft is just plain better at getting the word out about their products.

Nintendo's notoriously secretive because its mothership back in Japan doesn't want anyone to know anything. (In recent years, however, the company has thawed some—see our Wii cover story earlier this summer.) And if Nintendo's an evasive ninja that we can never pin down, Sony's the hotshot yakuza crime lord who doesn't really give a s*** about getting any coverage. Oh, he'll throw us a bone here and there, but in general, he has better things to do, like not putting out good games on the PSP or something.

Regardless, *Electronic Gaming Monthly* will continue to strive for equal coverage across the board. Nintendo and Sony might not change attitudes, but we'll keep pushing and pushing them. And you can trust that when it comes to criticism, reviews, and opinions, we'll be totally honest and unbiased, no matter who's playing or not playing ball with us.

So, now that you've read our Next Month page, you know our *other* big secret for the next issue, right? Yup, we're changing our look and our logo in preparation for a new age of total awesomeness...from us. So come for the *Halo 3* business—stay for the kick-ass new *EGM*.

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

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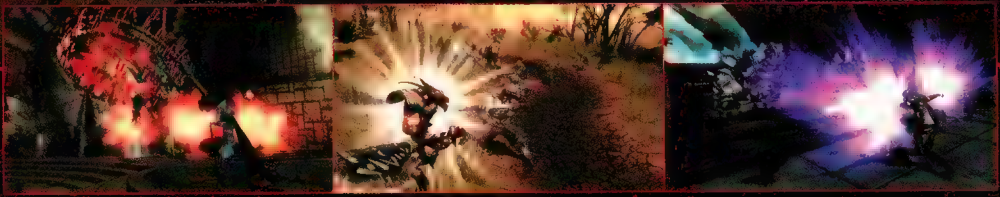

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letters

artsy-fartsy debates, curse words, hot teens, and killer crabs

Wish granted

I wish that Nintendo, Sony, or Microsoft would make a simple game where you play as a normal kid who goes to school, throws spitballs at other students, gets in trouble with teachers, and maybe even gets suspended. Oh, and after school, you could play basketball, hang out with your friends, or maybe go cause trouble with the local cops. I love games that let you go blow people's heads off, but I still think it'd be cool to have a game like this.

—Bruno Ferreria

We're not sure what's weirder—the fact that you want to play a virtual version of your own incredibly mundane life, or that *Grand Theft Auto* publisher Rockstar Games is actually making the damned thing. Yep, *Bully* (hitting the PS2 this October) basically covers all the bases you mentioned here, although in this game you'll be the one dishing out the atomic wedgies...not receiving them.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

But is it art?

I still hear gamers criticizing film critic Roger Ebert's suggestion that videogames are not art. Stop and think about it, though: Do we really want videogames to be art? As a fan of both, my answer is a very emphatic "no." While videogames undeniably have certain artistic elements, the very nature of games and art are not entirely compatible. Art is a more passive experience; an artist—such as an author, director, or painter—presents his/her completed vision for you to react to, one way or another. Games, on the other hand, are considerably more active. The programmers give you a basic framework, but the substance of the experience comes from how you play using the things you were given. It's a two-way street instead of a basic give-and-receive scenario. Games and art fundamentally operate on two different skill sets. This is why most movies make lousy games (*The Da Vinci Code* or *X-Men: The Last Stand*, for instance), and why most games make lousy movies (consider *Doom*, *BloodRayne*, *Silent Hill*, or a dozen others). Personally, I think the great value of videogames is set back when they try to be art. Games are unique and special, and should take pride in that rather than trying to shoehorn themselves into something that goes counter to their purpose.

—Mike McGranaghan

Thanks for the insights, Mike. Somewhere from his hospital bed, venerated film critic Roger Ebert is giving you two big thumbs up. We're giving you some random artsy-fartsy game from our library. Enjoy.

The only game in town

Like millions of other males aged 18 to 35, I bought my copy of *Madden NFL 07* the day of its release in hopes of playing out all of my pro-football dreams on my brand-new HD screen. Upon taking the game home and actually playing it, I instead found a glitchy game with bargain-basement production values. Seriously, is EA really spending any money on the *Madden* series anymore? Beyond the completely useless new features and the updated draft, there really isn't much improvement in the series at all.

This surely isn't helping EA's already tainted reputation in the gaming industry. And having the exclusive NFL license doesn't really provoke them to create better games either. The back of the *Madden* box where it says "No. 1 Selling Pro Football Franchise" should more appropriately be titled "The Only Selling Pro Football Franchise—Suck It."

—D. Terletsky

Madden laughs all the way to the bank.

Thanks to *Bully*, obnoxious brats can fulfill their fantasy...of being obnoxious brats.

We actually received several letters like this one, and although our reviewers didn't feel quite as ripped off... *Madden*'s scores have dipped a bit in the past two years. Has the lack of competition made this revered football franchise too complacent? Next season, look for a big shake-up in the field, with a new *NFL Blitz* installment and an original, unlicensed game from 2K Sports.

Disturbing developments

First off, I am the reader who, a number of months ago, declared that I was not going to read the letters section any longer because you made fun of a previous letter I wrote. I have decided I was far too hasty in my reaction and have since learned to appreciate your jibes in good humor. I even showed it to my English professor, mother, friends, and one stranger. Good show!

In other news, I recently had the time to take off the plastic of my copy of *Kingdom Hearts II* and start playing. It's a great game, but I noticed something rather odd. In the previous installment, Sora's playmate Kairi was completely flat-chested. Now, they are actually showing the curvature of her breasts. Not that I spend much time staring at preteens, but it's just...you know...noticeable.

—Ephraim Freed

We're glad that you came to appreciate the "tough love" in our reply to your previous letter, but we're perplexed by ➤

POST OFFICE

Rambling and ranting from our message boards, boards.1UP.com (look for *EGM*'s forums)

"This fall, I'll be playing..."

Nintendohalofreak13: ...anything that starts with *Z* and ends with *elda: Twilight Princess*.

Skett: ...*Gears of War*, because I can't wait to use a chainsaw gun on some poor sap online.

GunstarHeroes777: ...*Guitar Hero II*, because it rocks. Period.

TemplePilot: ...the classics over and over, because I have no money.

Juno500: ...the DS, because touching is good.

TheXGasm: ...with all your girlfriends while you're all busy playing your games. Losers!

DarkGeno21: ...a game called *Which bill should I pay?* after all the debt I put myself into buying new consoles.

Viewdrix: ...*Halo 2* online. I'm still not done yet.

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PlayStation®2

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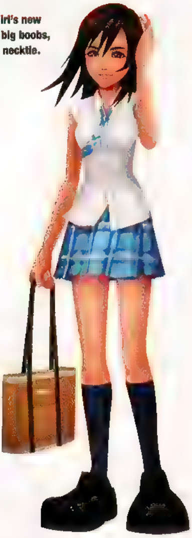
■ **Kairi's new look: big boobs, small necktie.**



your *Kingdom Hearts II* observation. If looking at the lovely lady lumps of a fictional 15-year-old girl has you all hot and bothered, maybe you should start introducing yourself to your professor, mother, friends, and strangers as "child predator."

Now loading

Are you aware that the Xbox 360 has a growing library of games with lots of loading time? I've noticed it in *Top Spin 2*, *MotoGP 06*, *Perfect Dark Zero*, *Project Gotham 3*, *Dead or Alive 4*, *Battlefield 2*, *Quake 4*.... Actually, the list just goes on and on. In fact, *Burnout Revenge* has shorter load times on the Xbox than on the Xbox 360. What gives? Do you guys find this to be acceptable? I don't know a lot about the technology involved, but I know about being a consumer, and this development stinks. I thought loading times were supposed to decrease as time went on, not increase? *—William Smith*

We're just as bummed out about it as you are, man. For the full scoop, dig up *EGM* #203, in which we ran "New & Not-Quite-So Improved," a story explaining exactly why this problem persists. And don't look for the PlayStation 3 to fare any better—early reports tell us that its Blu-ray drive reads discs even more slowly than the competition. At least the situation should improve once developers learn their way around the hardware.... Compare the load times in first-gen PS2 games with modern ones, and you'll see a colossal difference.

Dirty words

I may have thought that you guys went over the top with your infamous wank spread in *EGM* #201, but I was pleased to see you stuck to your guns when some whiny parent wrote in to condemn it. Gaming isn't just for kids anymore, and *EGM* has led the pack in terms of catering to a more mature audience. But why are you so willing to shock and offend with spreads like that, yet still unwilling to swear?

Yeah, yeah, you guys say "bitch" and "hell," but if I see one more "s***" or "f***" in your pages, I may lose my mind. Part of growing up means you use adult words, and when you take the easy way out by using those stupid asterisks, it feels like you're cheating us as readers. Everyone knows what the words are, guys. Those asterisks are just a smoke screen. Clear the facade, and let's talk like f***ing adults. *—Jim Smylie*

Many of our editors feel your pain, Jim. We'd love to drop F-bombs with reckless abandon like the esteemed writers of *Rolling Stone* or *Cat Fancy*, but the stuffy skinflints who sign our paychecks simply won't allow it...at least, not yet. Still, if you want some truly unfiltered, uncensored words from us, check out our motherf*ing blogs.**

You're so mathletic

In the Letters section of *EGM* #207, you replied to Philip's call for new forms of videogaming by making fun of accounting by proposing "the action-packed thrills of *1040EZ: Tax Preparation Deathmatch*." As a CPA, I would like to defend Philip by saying, "How dare you make fun of my bread and butter?" I'll have you know accounting is full of "thrills" and "action-packed."

Think about using the Wii's motion-sensing controller to do itemized deductions, compile double-accelerating depreciation, and prepare C-Corp tax return converted from accrue-base accounting. I'm not even talking about comparing a 50 percent vesting 401(k) plan versus a defined benefit retirement plan or converting from a FIFO inventory system to a LIFO or weighted average; that's a full course to beat right there! I don't think it's a good idea that you make fun of something you have little or no knowledge of. Stop shattering little kids' dreams of becoming accountants! *—Jim*

On one level, we want to applaud your letter's biting, self-depreciating humor. At the same time, however, we also want to steal your lunch money and stuff you in a locker. Afterward, you could exact revenge on us by kicking our asses at *Brain Age*.

Wish denied

I've noticed that a lot of games based on recent movies have sucked. Maybe they should try to make games based on older films. They should make, like, a *Die Hard* game or one based on an old Arnold Schwarzenegger movie like *True Lies* or *Last Action Hero*. I'm sick of "new and crappy!" I want the "old and awesome." *—K.M.Z.*

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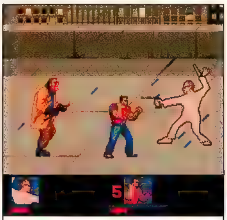
the quote, the movie it's from, and the page number on which you found it. Include your mailing address (no P.O. boxes!) and your full name, and you could be one of three lucky winners this month to receive an exciting arrangement of game prizes picked out just for you by us!

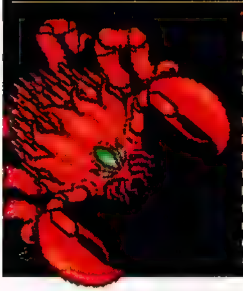
With games like *Scarface*, *The Godfather*, and *Dirty Harry* hitting store shelves decades after the flicks graced theaters, it would appear that you're getting your wish. And I'm pretty sure the word "awesome" has never been used to describe the irresponsibly awful Super NES and Sega Genesis platformers based on *True Lies* and *Last Action Hero*.



■ **Is this really want you want?**

LETTERS THAT TIME FORGOT

We sure receive a lot of letters about really antiquated games.... Can't you people afford new ones?



Trouble with crabs

Have you ever seen anyone solve *Blaster Master* (NES)? I have tried many times over the years, but I can't get past that goddamned crab! Ahh! *—D.L. Warren*

We totally solved that game tape back in '88. It's truly tough stuff. And the trick where you pause the game while tossin' grenades to kill bosses in one hit doesn't work on that particular foe. Our advice? Play a game from this millennium instead. We hear that fans of giant crabs will enjoy Sony's *Genji: Days of the Blade* for the PS3.

Revisionist history

I'm playing through *Final Fantasy VII* again, and I would like to point out that the character's name is Aeris, not Aerith. Hey, I thought it was Aerith, too, so now I have to call my friend and tell her that she was right. *—Carolyn Sanders*

Actually, we're all kind of right. In the original Japanese version of *FFVII*, her name was definitely romanized as Aerith, but when Sony (not Square, mind you) localized the game for the U.S., it inexplicably changed her name to Aeris. So, when Square Enix later translated *Kingdom Hearts*, *Advent Children*, and so on, it corrected the name to the original spelling, Aerith. No matter what, we still spell her status D-E-A-D. Spoiler!

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gaming news, previews, snap-together colossi, and other stuff

PLAYING WITH POWER

Just in time for the election season, EGM pegs the politicians who are taking pains to put games in their campaigns...

>> IF YOU'RE STILL PONDERING WHY YOU BOUGHT A PSP, SONY IS HOPING SOME PLAYSTATION NOSTALGIA WILL REINVIGORATE YOUR INTEREST. IT

During the election season this November, politicians will once again vie for the hearts and minds of the American people. They'll trash each other in ads. They'll debate hard-pressing issues like the economy and the war. They'll kiss hands and shake babies (or vice versa). But if there's one topic that even the most adversarial stumpers will join hands against, it's videogames. As Jon Stewart recently quipped on the *Daily Show*, "Congress found a topic anybody in any party can grandstand about."

Ever since U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman lambasted *Mortal Kombat* during the first congressional hearings about violent videogames in 1993, pixelated gore—and its potential effect on youth—has become one of Capitol Hill's favorite public enemies. Surrounded by Girl Scouts, Republican Arnold "The Governator" Schwarzenegger signed legislation in California that would ban the sale of violent games to minors. Democratic Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton picked up the ball last summer after the surprise leak of the Hot Coffee mod, an only-accessible-via-hacking sex scene in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* that got the game pulled from shelves.

The refrain, on both sides, is always the same: "We're doing this for the kiddies." "The disturbing material in *Grand Theft Auto* and other games like it is stealing the innocence of our children, and it's making the difficult job of being a parent even harder," said Senator Clinton. "I believe that the ability of our children to access pornographic and outrageously violent material on videogames rated for adults is spiraling out of control."

What's at stake? Potentially, your right to buy—and play—the games you want to play. While the videogame industry has its own voluntary ratings system, doled out by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board, the antigaming leadership has never quite felt like that's enough. The fallout of the Hot Coffee mod is still stinging. As a result, politicians are focused on hitting gamemakers—and players—where it counts: in their pocketbooks. With varying degrees of success, they've introduced legislation that would fine sellers and buyers of violent games or even ban them outright.

With votes to muster this fall, the spiral is reaching a crescendo. This year, on the cusp of the release of Sony's and Nintendo's next-gen consoles, politicos are on the warpath like never before. This June in Louisiana, Democratic Governor Kathleen Blanco signed bill HB 1381 into law, subjecting vendors to fines of between $100 and $2,000 and up to a year in prison for selling games with violent content. Then in August, Judge James Brady of the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana issued a preliminary injunction against the law, tagging it as a likely First Amendment violation.

Also this summer, a law in Minnesota that would fine kids themselves for buying M-rated games got overturned for being unconstitutional. "There is no showing whatsoever that videogames, in the absence of other violent media, cause even the slightest injury to children," Chief District Judge James Rosenbaum said of his ruling.

But as long as the generation gap persists, the specter of videogame violence is unlikely to vanish anytime soon. Videogames are the new rock 'n' roll, and until gamers start making themselves heard on election day, politicians will exploit them every opportunity they get. The Entertainment Software Association, the industry trade association, has even launched its own grass-roots group, the Video Game Voters Network, to mobilize the cause (see www.videogamevoters.org). Having trouble keeping track of the talking heads? Here's a cheat sheet on the major players in the battle of game politics—just in time for your visit to the voting booth this fall.

—David Kushner

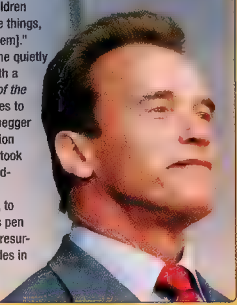
THE CAMPAIGNERS...

Arnold Schwarzenegger

His job: California governor (R)

His thoughts: "I am a big believer in those videogames.... We just want to make sure [they don't get] into the wrong hands, or children under the age of 10 start playing those things, because it does have an impact on [them]."

His vitals: The Governator did not come quietly to the issue of violent videogames. With a game of his own—*Terminator 3: War of the Machines*—under his belt and deep ties to the entertainment industry, Schwarzenegger dragged his heels on enacting legislation to ban the sale of games to minors. It took a posse of crusading Democrats, including State Treasurer Phil Angelides and Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante, to convince Schwarzenegger to wield his pen once and for all. Look for the issue to resurface as Schwarzenegger faces Angelides in November's race for the governor's mansion. Will he be back?



Joseph Lieberman

His job: U.S. senator, Connecticut (independent)

His thoughts: "The content of many cutting-edge games is becoming more vivid, violent, and offensive to our most basic values."

His vitals: After learning about *Mortal Kombat*'s spinal-rip move and the flesh-gnawing freaks in the Dana Plato sexploitation Sega CD game *Night Trap*, Lieberman launched Capitol Hill's first hearings on game violence. He even rounded up kids' host Captain Kangaroo to pine for the days of Lincoln Logs. Released in conjunction with the National Institute on Media and the Family, Lieberman's annual Video Game Report Card assigns a grade to game companies based on their adherence to family values. Lieberman cosponsored, with Senator Hillary Clinton, the Family Entertainment Protection Act, a bill that would prohibit the sale of violent games to kids. As he makes another play for the White House, Lieberman's pet cause is nearly 14 years strong. ➤

ANNOUNCED THE PLAYSTATION 1 DOWNLOAD SERVICE WILL LAUNCH IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE PLAYSTATION 3'S RELEASE THIS FALL... ➤➤

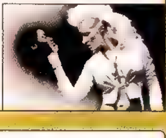
PLAYING WITH POWER (CONT.)

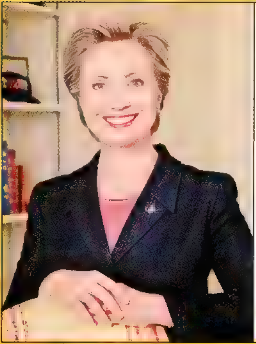
Leland Yee

His job: California state assemblyman (D)

His thoughts: "[The Hot Coffee mod] basically tells you how to copulate with a woman. It tells you how to do it, what position to do it. It's outrageous. [It] should not be in the hands of children."

His vitals: This previously little-known middle-aged California state assemblyman joined the antigaming cabal after the notorious Hot Coffee incident. Yee inked AB 1179, a California bill that bans the sale of violent games to anyone under 18. Last October, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger rounded up a group of Girl Scouts, propped up covers of outdated games like *Manhunt* and *Postal*, and signed Yee's bill into law. Yee hasn't backed down. This summer, he made headlines after successfully getting Sony to discontinue a Dutch advertisement for the PSP. The cryptic ad showed a white woman holding the face of a black woman (right), which Yee called demeaning. "I am pleased to see Sony taking responsibility for their racially charged ad and appropriately pulling it from the marketplace," he said.





Hillary Clinton

Her job: U.S. senator, New York (D)

Her thoughts: "We should all be deeply disturbed that a game which now permits the simulation of lewd sexual acts in an interactive format with highly realistic graphics has fallen into the hands of young people across the country."

Her vitals: Of all the politicians to come out of the woodwork over Hot Coffee, no one made a bigger splash than the former First Lady. Word of the secret coitus struck a nerve with Senator Clinton, who joined the outcry for a ratings overhaul. With Lieberman at her side, Clinton would later throw her support behind the Family Entertainment Protection Act. But, most shockingly of all, word surfaced that Clinton's knowledge on the issue came from a briefing with none other than Jack Thompson, the crusading Miami attorney most often associated with the far-right wing of the Republican party. Clinton has had no comment on that association. With a much-rumored presidential run in her sights, she's possibly the best-positioned politician of all to strike a deathblow to violent games.

Doug Lowenstein

His job: President, Entertainment Software Association

His thoughts: "We don't think 12-year-olds are rushing out with money to buy *Grand Theft Auto*."

His vitals: As the head of the gaming industry's trade association, Lowenstein is on the front lines of the deathmatch with the opponents of violent videogames. It ain't easy. In addition to heading up initiatives on videogame piracy and free trade, Lowenstein has the unenviable job of being the whipping boy for the antigaming crusaders. In the wake of the Hot Coffee mod, attorney Jack Thompson wrote an open letter asserting that Lowenstein "never met a pixilated [*sic*] prostitute he didn't like." For Lowenstein, the lashing is simply a matter of the public's misconception that games, like Trix, are for kids. "A lot of critics tend to overlook that we're a mass-market medium," Lowenstein says. "The average age of people playing games is 30. Critics think the only people playing games are 15-year-old boys. That's just completely dead, 180 degrees wrong."

WHO AM I?

1

No food tickles my tummy more than a delicious bowl of pasta!

2 People accuse me of copying others, but honestly, they're all copying my sensational style.

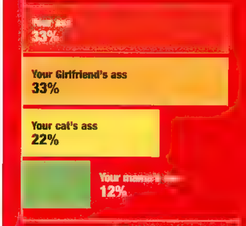
3 I travel around the world a lot, but nothing beats the good ol' U.S. of A.

4 If you don't think the dragon is the coolest animal in the Chinese calendar, I will totally punch you in the face.

5 Some people calm their anger by counting to 10. Me? I kick the crap out of cars.

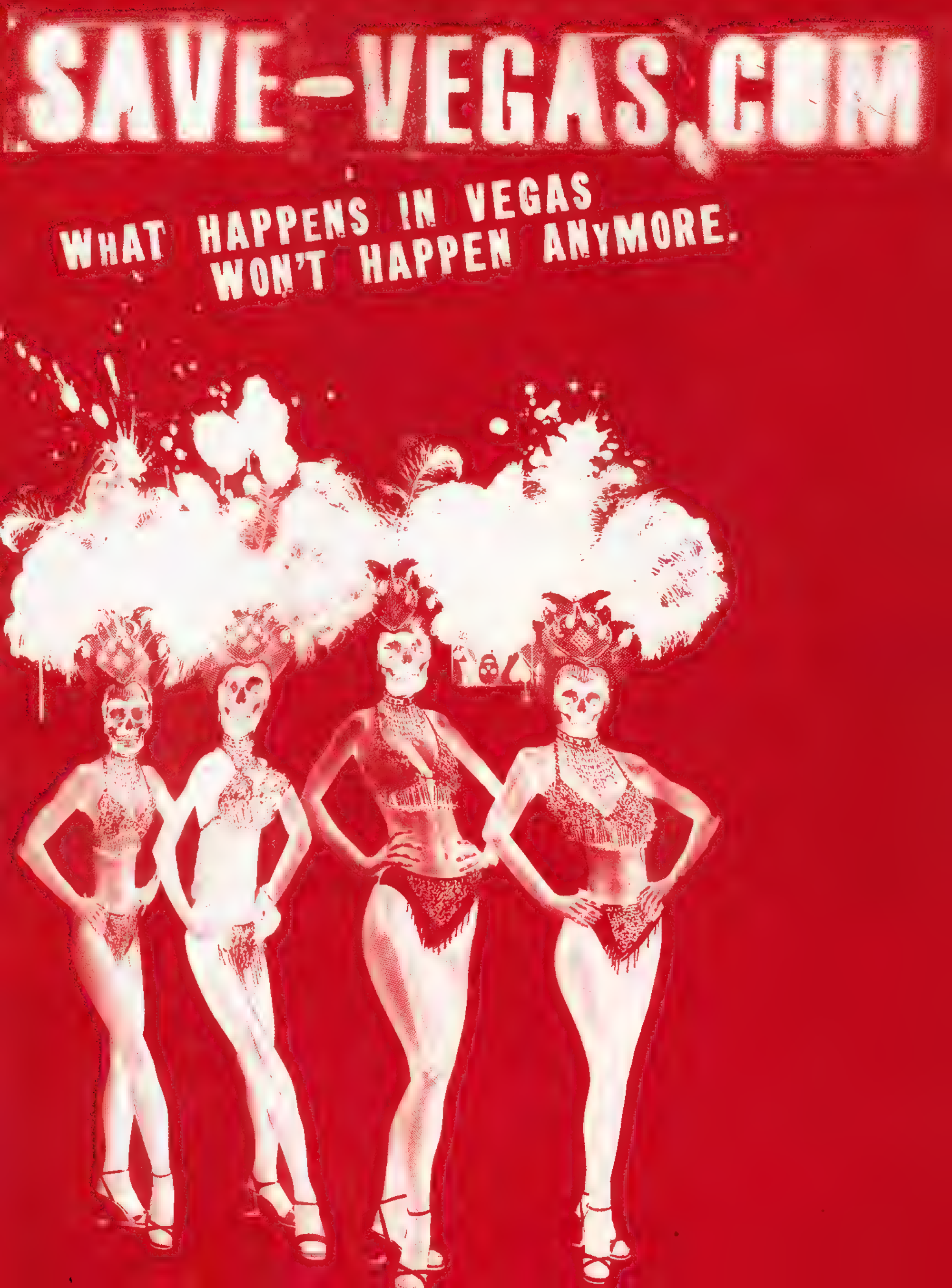
Answer: Ken Masters from *Street Fighter II*

What is the first thing you are going to take a photo of with the XBOX LIVE VISION CAMERA?



Source: EGM message boards

>> IN CASE YOU NEEDED ANOTHER WORLD WAR II GAME, UBISOFT ANNOUNCED *BROTHERS IN ARMS D-DAY* IS COMING TO THE PSP THIS FALL.... >>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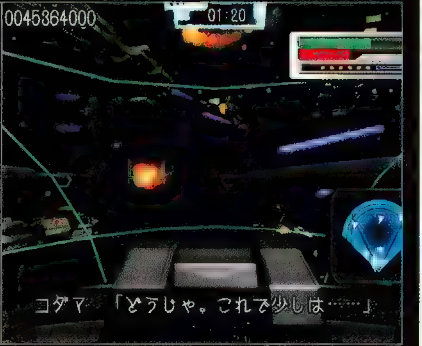
PS2

THE OTOKO-TACHI NO KIJUU HOUZA

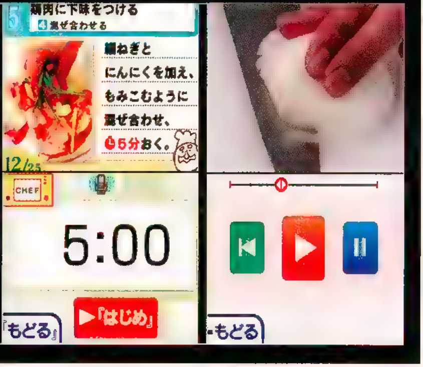
What's the story with this one? Well, it's pretty simple, actually. As a gunner on a *Millennium Falcon*–ish starship, you zip through 18 rail-shooter stages while blowing up tons (and tons) of typical sci-fi fodder. **So why should I care?** Because this game is actually a milestone—it's the 100th game in D3 Publisher's Simple 2000 series, a massive line of Japanese PS2 budget titles that all go for 2,000 yen (about $17). Featuring everything from old standbys (*The Dungeon RPG*) to the downright insane (*The Friendship Adventure*), the lineup is everything wrong with Japanese games—and everything so, so right with them.

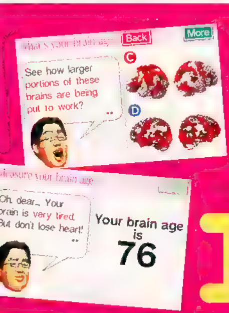


Nintendo DS

SHABERU! DS ORYOURI NAVI

This isn't what I think it is, is it? Yep! Nintendo's latest surefire million-selling "nongame" is a cooking tutor for, well, your typical Japanese gamer. Complete instructions for over 200 dishes are provided, each with voice commentary and even video examples that show you exactly what a rolling boil is. You can even choose foods you don't like (tomatoes, for example) and *Navi* won't introduce any recipes with that ingredient. **But is there a *game* in all this?** Sure—just load up *Navi*'s built-in cooking timer, and you can have a little *Game & Watch* action while waiting for the cookies to rise.




Back
More
See how larger portions of these brains are being put to work?
C
D
Oh, dear... Your brain is very tired. But don't lose heart!
Your brain age is 76

BY THE NUMBERS

Drain the brain

20 Ideal age obtained in *Brain Age* for DS

90 Purported IQ of Koko, the "talking gorilla"

100 Average IQ for a human being

1 Copy of *Brain Age* sent to President Bush to whip up his wit

>> UBISOFT IS FORCING A NEW *STAR WARS* GAME ONTO THE PSP AND DS—*STAR WARS: LETHAL ALLIANCE* LIGHTS UP STORES IN DECEMBER.... >>

WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE

GIANT VALVE BLOWOUT
COMPUTER GAMING
The PC Gaming Authority
TEAM FORTRESS

In the News

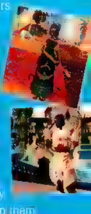
Whores of WarCraft

Judging from the preview videos at www.whoresofwarcraft.com (think dudes in chainmail "stabbing" wenches), *World of WarCraft*–addicted masses can now...erm...enjoy a *WOW*-themed fetish porn site—assuming Blizzard's lawyers don't step in. Our only question: Why "Whores of WarCraft," as opposed to the infinitely more amusing "World of WhoreCraft"?

Coming Up

Guild Wars Nightfall

The next expansion to *Guild Wars*, ArenaNet's wildly popular fantasy-action massively multiplayer online role-playing game, spins an epic (and totally cliche-free, we're sure) story about rogue gods and encroaching darkness in a land that desperately needs heroes. Players get another 300-some skills to keep existing characters on the hamster wheel, along with two exotic new professions: the Dervish (a scythe-wielding mystic) and the Paragon (a heavily armored warrior with leadership skills that benefit his entire group). But the biggest new feature—players can now customize *Guild Wars*' previously brain-dead NPC henchmen, equip them with better weapons and skills, and *issue orders to them*. Good thing *that* only took a year and a half!



Now Playing

The Ship

The latest bit of quirk to hit Valve Software's Steam download service: *The Ship*, a psychological first-person action game that's part *Clue*, part *Sims*, and part *Hitman*. Up to 16 players roam a crowded cruise ship, each in search of a single, specific, and randomly assigned target to whack—while constantly ducking their own would-be assailant through the use of aliases and disguises, and tending to *Sims*-like needs such as bathroom breaks and sleep. Think of it as a big game of cat-and-mouse-and-cat, perfect for short stretches of time...and for jaded first-person-shooter haters.

—Ryan Scott

Ryan Scott is the reviews editor for our sister publication Computer Gaming World.

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Jump in.

XBOX 360

countdown to launch

T-MINUS ONE MONTH UNTIL

Your monthly prep for the PlayStation 3 and Wii liftoffs

Prepare for a battle, Microsoft. Next month, both Sony and Nintendo enter the next-gen fray (the PS3 drops Nov. 17, with the Wii landing only two days later). But unlike these up-and-comers, Microsoft already has a year's worth of games to gloat about. A bigger library, sure, but any new system ships with several choices—some sweet (*Halo*) and some rotten (*Fantavision*)—that hungry gamers will gobble up. So since we can't review the day one offerings of the PS3 and Wii *now*, we looked back at what we *did* review for the PS2's and GameCube's launches to see if Sony and Nintendo have a better chance this go-around.

PS3'S LAST-GEN LESSON

PS2 launch: October 26, 2000

Number of launch games reviewed in *EGM*: 29

Average score: 7.1 (out of 10)

What went right: Although the PS2 didn't slay consumers with a true killer app, Sony did manage to launch with a whopping 29 games. Variety was actually the real killer—just about every gaming genre had at least a couple of options, perfect for the extra finicky folks. From fighting (*Tekken Tag Tournament*) and sports (*Madden NFL 2001*) to racing (*Ridge Racer V*) and even billiards (*Q-Ball: Billiards Master*), it wasn't too difficult for Sony to shill its massive (but mostly mediocre) lineup.

What went wrong: Aside from a handful of winners, the PS2's launch was mostly filled with rushed-out rubbish. No matter how pretty *Fantavision* looked or how much we wanted role-playing games *Orphen: Scion of Sorcery* and *Summoner* to hang on the same cloud as *Final Fantasy VII*, it was clear these games were made for ignorant launch hopefuls who willingly bought any Sony-approved schlock.

Why the PS3 launch could kick ass: If Sony can manage to muster up as many games for the PS3 launch as it did for the PS2, it could at least give reluctant gamers a choice between the two next-gen powerhouses. Plus, sweet-looking exclusives like *Resistance: Fall of Man* and *MotorStorm* are the kinds of games that will likely make 360 and Wii owners a little bit jealous. But even if the games don't mange to impress, the packed-in Blu-ray player will at least make next generation DVDs look $600 good.

LAP RECORD
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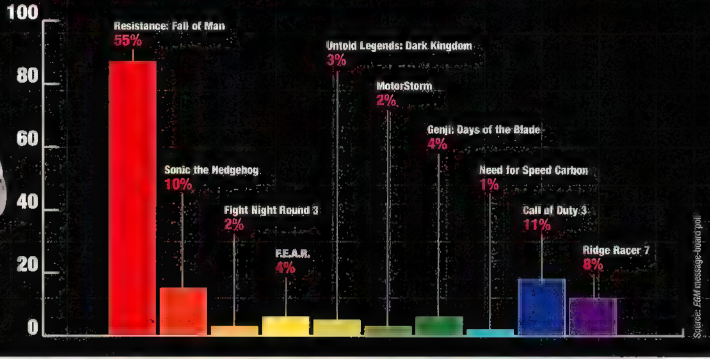
TOTAL TIME
0'01"480
13
0'01"480
AT 6
888 km/h

Ridge Racer V for the PS2

Why the PS3 launch could suck ass: Um, shortages—Sony already announced it nixed its initial shipment to Europe, which isn't a good sign for us...especially since we're now only getting 400,000 units (100,000 less than the PS2's launch). So even if you have the dough to throw, good luck finding a PS3 without spending enormous eBay prices. Plus most of the launch titles are also coming out on the 360, too, so it's not like you'll be missing out if you already bought a 'box.

WHAT PS3 GAMES ARE READERS CRAVING?



Source: *EGM* message-board poll

>> ACCLAIMED SCI-FI WRITER, ORSON SCOTT CARD, IS WORKING ON ANOTHER BOOK THAT WILL LATER BE TRANSFORMED

NEXT-GEN IMPACT

WII'S LAST-GEN LESSON

GameCube launch: November 18, 2001

Number of launch games reviewed in *EGM*: 10

Average score: 7.7 (out of 10)

What went right: Not a lot, actually. But wannabe Jedis felt a great disturbance in their pants for the exclusive *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II* (our highest-rated launch game, receiving straight 9s). And some staffers dug the freakishly different *Luigi's Mansion* (not Shoe, though—he gave it a meager 5.5), but, for the most part, the launch lineup was filled with above-average third-party games.

What went wrong: Games...or lack thereof. To Nintendo's defense, at least it wasn't quite as pathetic as the Nintendo 64's lineup of...uhh...two games. Of course, no one cared then because one of those games, *Super Mario 64*, tided us all over until a flood of new games shipped. But sadly, the GameCube didn't launch with a *Super Mario 64*–caliber game. Hell, it didn't even have a *Mario* game. Instead, we got his lanky brother chasing a bunch of ghosts with a vacuum cleaner.

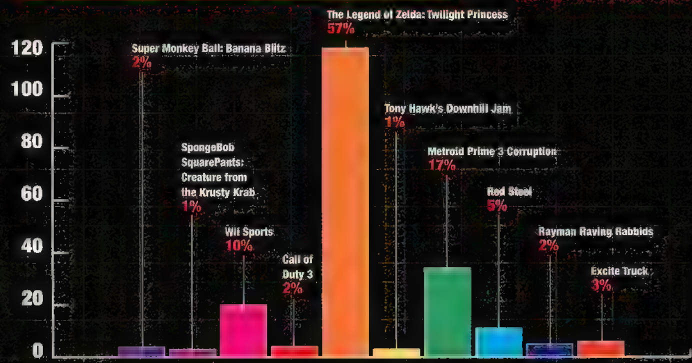
Why the Wii launch could kick ass: The Wii's $249.99 price point makes it considerably more affordable than its competitors, and Nintendo's even throwing in a free pack-in game—the infinitely replayable *Wii Sports* collection. Expect 20 titles to hit store shelves on day one, along with at least 30 downloadable Virtual Console classics (price range: $5-$10). And having the long-awaited *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* at launch constitutes a groundbreaking first: No Nintendo console has ever shipped alongside a *Zelda* (and the GC version won't hit until December).

Why the Wii launch could suck ass: OK, the first-party Nintendo games will likely be stellar, but what about the rest? Sure, some look promising (*Rayman Raving Rabbids*), but others (*Red Steel*) haven't exactly convinced us to strap on a Wii-Remote. And no matter how much fun the games are, those searching for a truly "next-gen" experience may be turned off by the Wii's GameCube-quality graphics.

FORM
GUNS
TIEs
FLEE
LAP 3
2
1'19"167

Clockwise from top: GameCube launch games *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader*, *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, and *Luigi's Mansion*

WHAT Wii GAMES READERS ARE CRAVING?



Source: *EGM* message-board poll

INTO A GAME. THE NEXT-GEN PROJECT, ENTITLED *EMPIRE*, IS LOOKING TO COME OUT IN 2008.... >

PS3 **PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK**

LAIR

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Factor 5
Release Date: 2007

Forget X-wings versus TIE fighters. Thar be dragons—hundreds of them—in this spectacular PS3 slay ride from the guys behind the Rogue Squadron games

Not even the might of a million whizzing TIE fighters could coax developer Factor 5 back to George Lucas' galaxy far, far away. "If we had to do another Star Wars game after *Rebel Strike* [for GameCube], I'd shoot myself," says Julian Eggebrecht, president of the San Rafael, CA–based studio that's been developing laser-blasting starfighter titles for the past 10 years. It made for a decade filled with too many trips to iceball planetoid Hoth, set to too much John Williams music.

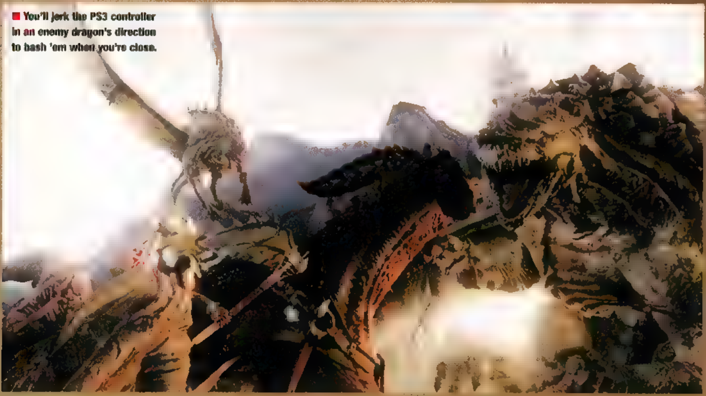
So when this previously Nintendo-chummy developer decided back in 2004 to test next-generation hardware by seeing how many TIE fighters they could cram on the screen (the result: thousands), the show of force left them feeling flat. "It doesn't really matter whether you have a hundred of them or a thousand," Eggebrecht says. "It's still just TIE fighters. It's way cooler to have living creatures on the screen."

That explains Factor 5's latest project: *Lair*, a TIE-fighter no-fly zone crawling with thousands of living creatures and due on the PlayStation 3 in 2007. The game has you mounting dragons and "dogfighting" other winged monsters—or taking your beast in for a landing and tearing through ground troops, slapping them aside with your horned head, plucking them into the air, or chomping them down for a health boost like in some gorily modern reforging of the classic coin-op *Rampage*. "When we moved away from the *Star Wars* universe, we still wanted to stay with flight," says Eggebrecht. "But we wanted to have a game that transitions seamlessly between air and ground combat, something we couldn't do on the GameCube, PS2, or Xbox." Dragons—with their ability to soar, hover, and dash across land like scaly, winged horses—seemed like the logical choice for the game's "vehicles." The team was sold, but Eggebrecht, not a fantasy fanatic himself, had one major condition. "The dragons don't talk," he says. "We don't have Sean Connery providing any voices."

Soar spots

"Those meters at the top of the screen show the morale of your troops versus the enemy soldiers," explains Eggebrecht, giving us an aerial tour of one of the game's missions. His dragon soars above two armies—thousands strong—approaching each other across a stone bridge spanning a misty volcanic wasteland, while hundreds of enemy winged creatures ride thermals in the distance.

The goal of this level: Lead your troops to victory. Eggebrecht starts by knocking out enemy catapults, blasting them apart with flame breath and rending them with melee attacks. Then, it's off to down a squadron of black dragons and their riders, a plunging battle you can read more about in the Taking the Reins sidebar. Finally, it's time to get dirty on ➤



You'll jerk the PS3 controller in an enemy dragon's direction to bash 'em when you're close.

THE IPOD ISN'T JUST FOR ROCKING OUT AND WATCHING *THE OFFICE* ON THE BUS ANYMORE: APPLE INTRODUCED A NEW MODEL (STARTING AT

The good news: You'll battle other dragons in close-up, claw-to-claw combat. The bad news: That's you on the little dragon.

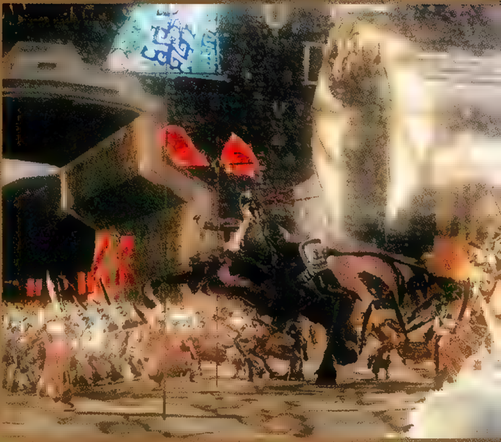
$250) THAT PLAYS CASUAL GAMES SUCH AS *TETRIS*, *BEJEWELED*, AND *PAC-MAN*. YOU CAN DOWNLOAD THE GAMES ON ITUNES FOR $5 A POP.... >>

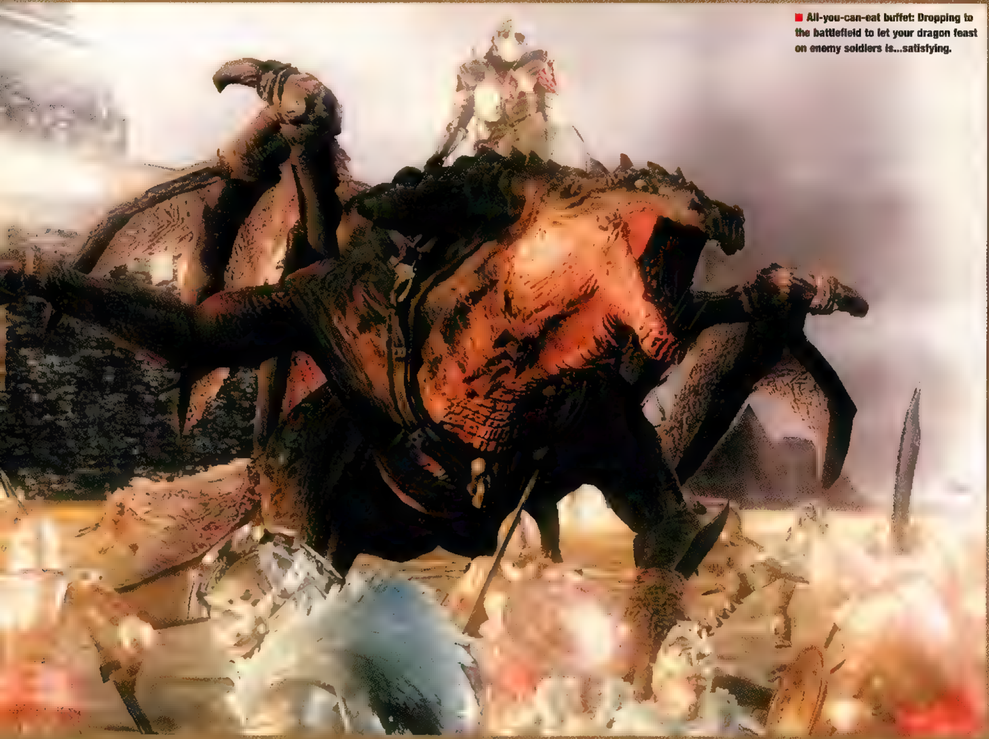
LAIR (CONT.)

the battlefield. Eggebrecht swoops low over the enemy army, rapid-tapping the X button to beat wings and build speed, just before dropping to the ground and skidding through platoons of soldiers. They go flying. Enemy archers prick the dragon's reptilian hide with arrows, but Eggebrecht tears through them. Each attack fills his army's morale meter and drains the enemy's fighting spirit. Charging bull-like monsters enter the fray, but the dragon simply grabs them with his talons and drops them into the abyss. Soon the battle ends in victory, and Eggebrecht's army marches through the enemy's gate.

Not all of *Lair*'s levels will work this way. The game starts more like a shooter (think *Rogue Squadron*, but with dragons). Some stages have you fighting mostly on the ground. You'll face minibosses, larger army-on-army troop-support battles like the one described above, "and then there are really, really, really big bosses," says Eggebrecht. He won't tell us much about the bosses or the story, other than that you will get off your dragon once in awhile in special areas—but never to fight on foot. You'll also build up dragon-riding skills by "shooting down certain enemies and doing the moves cleverly and fighting combinations right," he says.

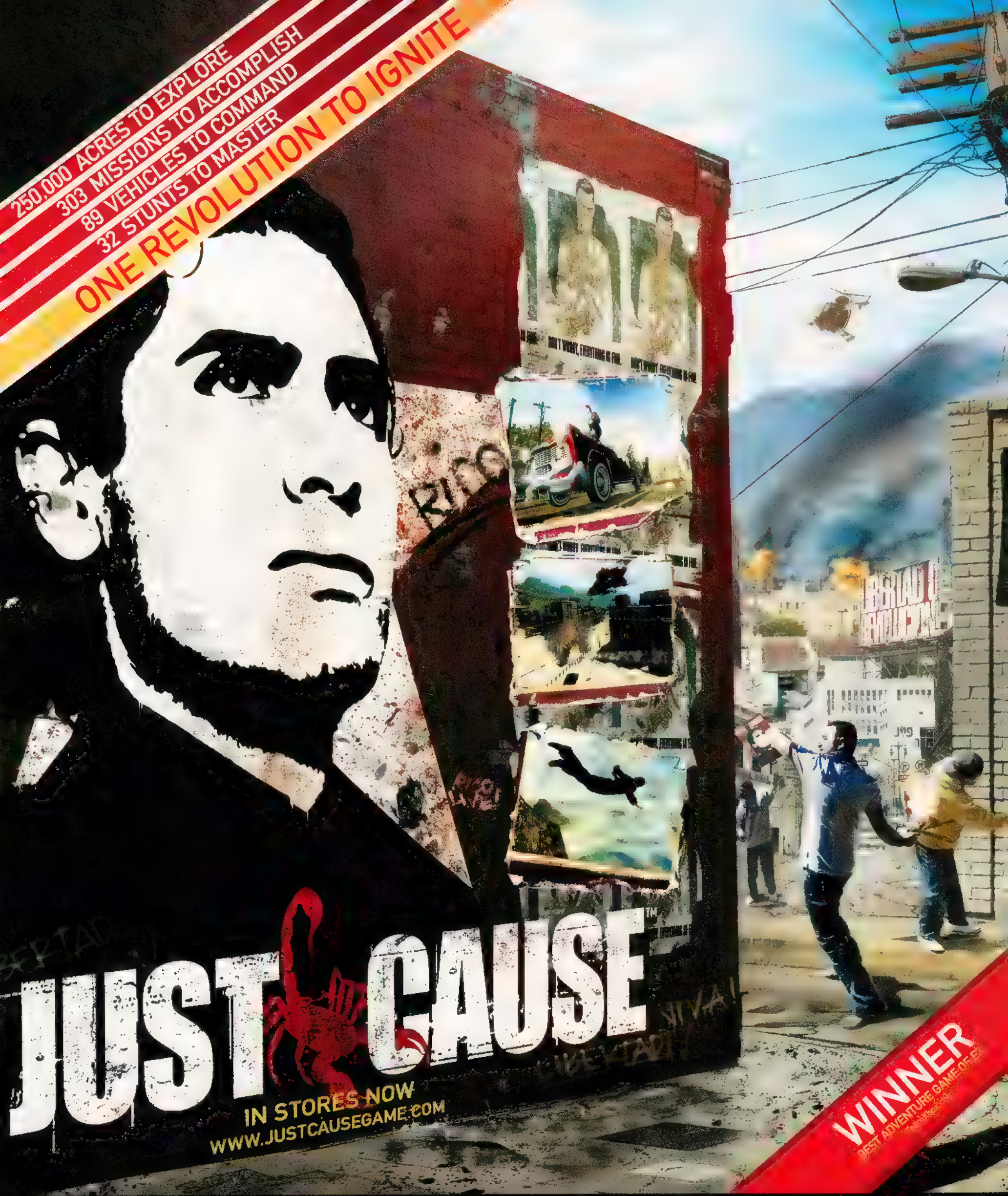
Flight itself is actually easier than in the *Rogue Squadron* games—an attempt to make *Lair* more mainstream friendly. Much of that ease comes from the motion-sensing control scheme, which we'll get to in a sec. But another reason: You're riding an intelligent creature, which—much like a horse—will dodge obstacles on its own. "A dragon wouldn't be stupid enough to fly into a wall," says Eggebrecht. "They are really damn intelligent, about as smart as dolphins. It's like the best pet you ever had."





All-you-can-eat buffet: Dropping to the battlefield to let your dragon feast on enemy soldiers is...satisfying.

>> UBISOFT IS GAMBLING ON ANOTHER VERSION OF *RAINBOW SIX VEGAS*—A PSP INCARNATION WILL BE CASHED AND CARRIED THIS WINTER.... >>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LAIR (CONT.)

Winging it

Up until now, Eggebrecht has been playing the game with casual flicks of the wrist, holding the PS3's motion-sensing controller with one hand while pointing out items of interest with the other. "Not only does the controller give you the feeling of holding the dragon's reigns," he says, "but we have seven or eight moves just on the motion sensor." That saves players from having to input button-and-stick combinations (to, say, charge forward, now you just jerk the controller downward; or strafe to the left, you yank the joypad in the direction you want to juke).

In fact, the team is considering not supporting the analog stick for flight control at all. "A lot of the old-timers and hardcore people came in and were like, 'This [motion sensing] doesn't work—I want my stick back,'" says Eggebrecht. "But then they start trying it out, and it's amazing what they can do with the thing." Tilting the joypad, he explains, actually offers a greater range of motion than an analog stick, thus granting players more precise flight control. "And, really, joysticks are for aircraft, not dragons."

When it's our turn to take the beast for a spin, we overcompensate with wild yanks and spazzy motions on the controller. But soon we settle into a rhythm with the game, holding the joypad with both hands as if we're gripping the reins of a real dragon. Our movements become less exaggerated, even as we pull the pad up for quick turnarounds and slam it to the side to dodge catapult fire and ram nearby winged creatures. "The level designers worried they'd get [carpal tunnel syndrome] from the controllers," says Eggebrecht. "By the third day, you play quite subtly. You don't need to do massive motions. It's just normal playing." ➤

Dragon one: "Black dragons fly like this, and white dragons fly like this." Dragon two: "It's funny because it's true."

TAKING THE REINS: WE HOP IN LAIR'S SADDLE

Normal flight

Whether you're in the air or galloping on the ground, you control your dragon in *Lair* the same way—by tilting the PS3 joypad in the direction you want to go. Tapping the X button flaps your wings for speed boosts, while holding the analog triggers applies the brakes (just like in the *Rogue Squadron* games). Use the Square button to launch fireballs (holding it releases a constant stream of fire). Factor 5 wouldn't tell us what the right analog stick does, just that "you'll be using it a lot." Squadron commands, perhaps?

Zagging and zigging

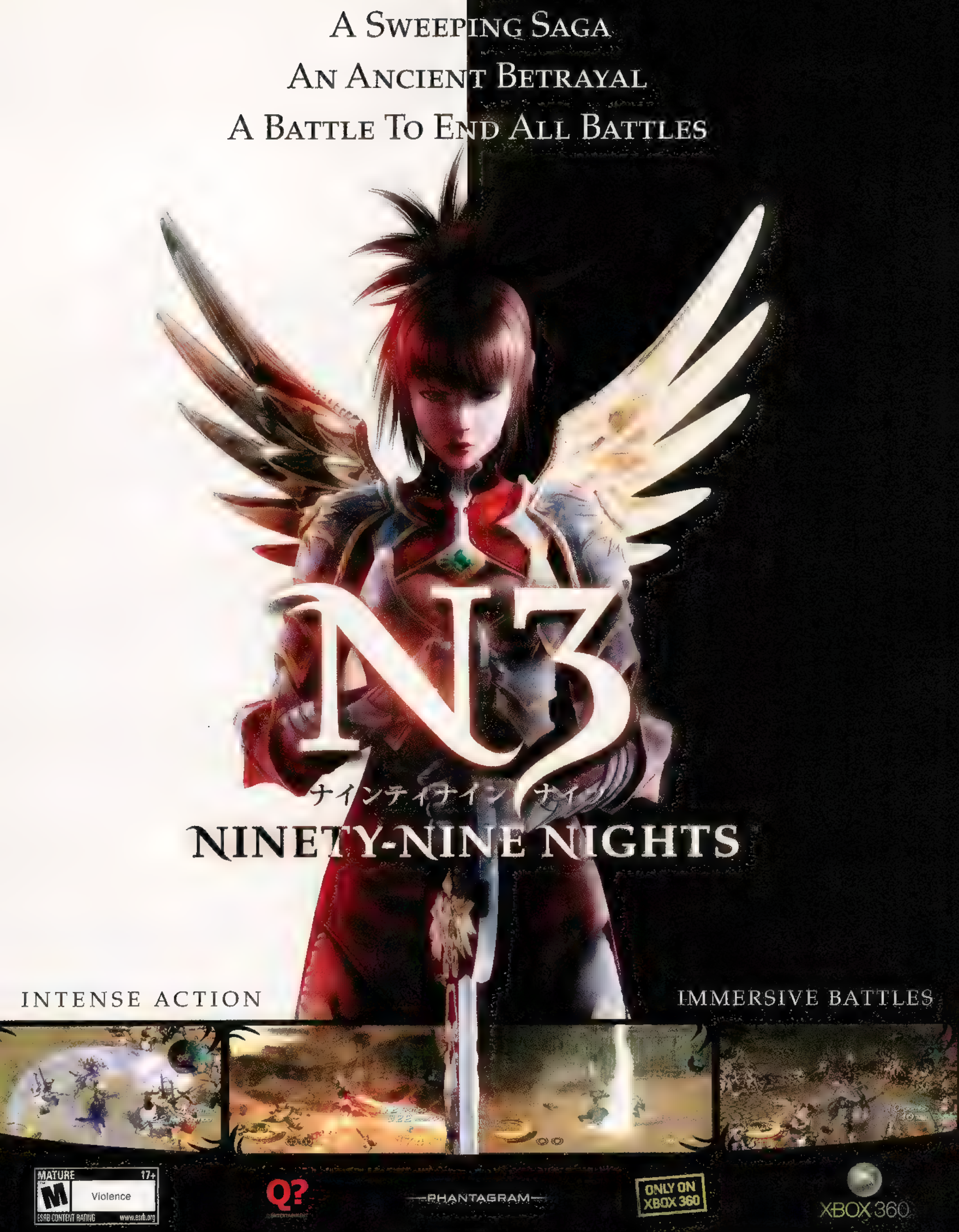
Got an enemy on your tail? Shake the controller hard to the left or right to dodge its fireballs. Or yank it up to quickly loop in the opposite direction. Thrusting it downward gives you a turbo boost—perfect for ensnaring enemies into your "pursuit bubble," which we'll explain next.

Hot pursuit

Once you've zeroed in on an enemy and zoomed in close, it'll fall into your pursuit bubble, a mode that shifts the game's perspective so the bogey appears in the center of the screen. You then lurch the controller in the enemy's direction to bash him with your dragon's body. If he's above you, for instance, jerk the controller up and you'll ram him. Once the enemy is weak enough, your dragon sinks its talons into its haunches, switching *Lair* into a full-on fighting game. You key in fight combos to battle the opposing rider with your mounted warrior. Eventually, you'll have to perform a *God of War*–style sequence that finishes the enemy pilot in a dramatic fashion, leaving you to retake the reins of your own dragon and soar off looking for more victims.

Although you can wallop enemy riders off their mounts via button combos, you can't actually swipe their dragons.

>> THE DS CAN NOW TEACH YOU HOW TO BAKE CAKES—MAJESCO ANNOUNCED THE QUIRKY BAKERY SIM *CAKE MANIA* FOR THE DS.... >>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LAIR (CONT.)

Reality sets in

Lair's levels give you room to stretch your wings and check out the scenery. "You can fly 16 miles away from the bridge," Eggebrecht says of the level with the clashing armies, "and look back and still see all 10,000 soldiers on there and everything. The game's just seamless." The environments (all outdoors, despite the claustrophobic-sounding *Lair* name) range from jungle to wastelands to ice fields. "They're believable," he says. "They bring it down to a level of grittiness, dirtiness, and nastiness of the world, where it's not [illegible]

[illegible] and see," Eggebrecht says. "We'll talk to *Rogue Squadron* publisher LucasArts to see if they'll license it officially—for tradition."

He's kidding. We think. *—Crispin Boyer*

Although the dragons do breathe fire, "this isn't traditional *Dungeons & Dragons*–style fantasy," says Factor 5's Eggebrecht.

FIVE REASONS FACTOR 5 HEARTS THE PS3...

"When I heard what was going on at Nintendo, I cringed," Factor 5 President Julian Eggebrecht says about the development of the underpowered Wii. "Its audio is relatively mediocre. It is essentially GameCube 1.5, which is fine, because all the motion-control stuff they're doing is pretty radical. That's precisely why the 360 wasn't exciting to me, because it didn't have the jump there, even though it had everything else." So what's a company famous for pushing hardware to the limits to do? Jump to Sony's ship—and here's why...

Reason 1: The Cell thingamabob

The multicore processor powering the PS3 is a turbo-powered leap over what Factor 5 was used to working with on the GameCube. For *Lair*, the Cell is used to govern A.I. and generate all the polygonal models in the game, from soldiers to creatures to terrain. "Our worlds are [illegible] kilometers square," says Eggebrecht. "By contrast, the *Rogue Leader* levels were 16 kilometers and every 16 meters, we had some detail in the world. Here, we have detail every two meters. It's a big 'wow' in terms of how much detail we can provide. It's also a lot more work for us."

Reason 2: The HDMI whatsit

That fat A/V socket on the rear of the $600 model PS3 gives the home-theater fanatics at Factor 5 a funny feeling in their video cables. For one thing, it's letting them display *Lair* in cutting-edge 1080p, an incredibly sharp video mode they claim won't take a hit on performance. For another, *Lair* will support 7.1 uncompressed digital surround sound. "Once you hear it for the first time in uncompressed audio, there's no going back," says Eggebrecht, adding that the game's super sound is one area most consumers won't own the right A/V gear to enjoy. "I hope enough people put down the cash for [a compatible receiver]," he says. "Maybe we're just doing it for ourselves."

Reason 3: The tilt-and-tumble controller

Eggebrecht never thought motion-sensing would make it into the PS3 controller, even though he says he lobbied for it all along. "[Sony] had to pay for the Blu-ray drive," he says. "They had to pay for the Cell. So I was absolutely blown away when the motion control made it in, because that's the whole package. As for the loss of the controller's rumble feature, "I never cared for that anyway," Eggebrecht says.

Reason 4: Those blue rays

Dirty Dancing: Mordor Nights

"If people are saying it's inconsequential that they can't use more than the nine gigabytes [of conventional DVDs], that's absolutely wrong," says Eggebrecht. He points to *Lair*'s ultra-hi-resolution textures, which stream off the game's 25-gigabyte Blu-ray DVD to paint incredibly detailed landscapes, fortresses, soldiers, and creatures. Add in its animations and other data, and just one level alone fills more than four gigabytes of disc space. "Which is fine if you want to make just a two-level game on the other systems," Eggebrecht says.

Reason 5: Finally, online gaming

After dealing with the GameCube's lack of networking abilities, just the prospect of any online system gets Factor 5 jazzed. "Sony has for its online program pretty much everything that Microsoft has, plus X," says Eggebrecht. *Lair* won't offer online multiplayer, but it will have a leaderboard, Xbox Live–style achievements (based on the medal system that was so popular in the *Rogue Squadron* games), and links to "a lot of community stuff," says Eggebrecht. Downloadable content is in the pipeline, too, with Factor 5 ready to add anything fans ask for. "Hey, if they want to breed dragons," he says of a possible minigame, "let's breed your dragons."

>> THE WII WON'T BE LONG NOW—IBM FINISHED MAKING THE SYSTEM'S CHIP BACK IN JULY, SO THE WII SHOULD BE READY TO SHIP SOON.... >>

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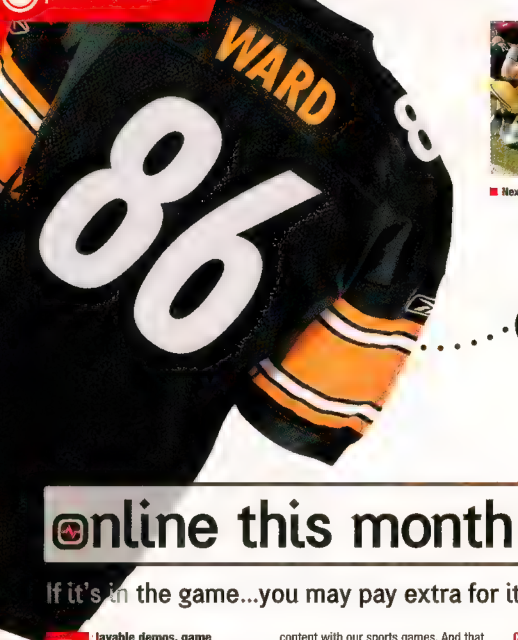
UBISOFT



■ Next year: 200 points for an extra-large cup.

online this month

If it's in the game...you may pay extra for it

Playable demos, game trailers, new multiplayer maps—Microsoft's Xbox Live Marketplace has quickly become the ultimate hot spot for Xbox 360 gamers. So obviously EA wants a piece, and, starting this fall, it'll be using its long-standing sports titles to bring in the bucks. We recently spoke to Chip Lange, the company's vice president of online commerce, who explained what EA will offer and, unfortunately, why you'll be spending extra cash for content that used to be part of the original package.

EGM: So we hear you will begin charging for common stuff like extra uniforms and stadiums. This true?

CL: There will be a mix of content that's out there right now—demos and such—that you'll be getting for free. And there will be content that we think is premium that we'll be charging for.

EGM: OK, so what do you say to the loyal *Madden* player who's been buying the game for 17 years and is used to getting this "extra content" for free? Remember, he's already paying an additional $10 for the 360 version....

CL: First thing I'm going to say to them is, "thanks." [*Laughs*] The next thing I'd probably say is, "We've heard you." Something that all of our customers have been asking for is a variety of premium content with our sports games. And that content's going to take multiple forms. And then there's some of the stuff coming further down the pipe this fall, like different game modes—every game's going to have a different selection of stuff. And they're premium products, and they've got a price associated with them, and I think that's become standard on the 360.

EGM: Charging for new modes makes a lot of sense, but a new uniform, for instance, doesn't really alter the gameplay....

CL: Well, that's a matter of opinion. I play a bunch of these games, and *Need for Speed* would be a great example. That game is built on customizing the look of your cars, and part of that is customizing the way that your transmission and your tires work. But a lot of these games is customizing to your own particular preference.

EGM: We think it's kind of ridiculous that we have to pay more money now for something we've been getting for free for so many years.

CL: I think what you're doing is keying in on one small aspect of the entire lineup of content....

EGM: OK, so will you be offering all the extra content as a package, rather than charging individually for each little thing?

CL: The content's going to vary by sports title. The development teams have been cranking on this for a month now, to figure out how many different types of content and what we think would be the coolest stuff that they could get to. Now we've got a team working on next year's *Madden*, and we've got a secondary team that's also sitting there cranking on all kinds of new content to keep *Madden* current and fun. So that's more content for *Madden* fans, and if you're a diehard, the reaction we've gotten is, "That's great."

EGM: When next year's game comes out, will people have to buy things like jerseys and stadiums all over again?

CL: A lot of the details aren't fully firmed up yet. The reality is that it's a new thing for a lot of people, and we're leading the charge on new content for sports. So, what it means for *Madden NFL 08*? We've certainly talked about it and thought about it, but we're not sure at this point.

EGM: Can we expect EA to support the PlayStation 3's and the Wii's online services, too?

CL: If there's a system that supports it. I think what you're hearing is that EA Sports believes in continuing to support our products beyond the launch, with all kinds of cool incremental content. And we'll make sure that content's made available wherever there's an appropriate system to deliver it to our customers.

WHAT'S UP AT 1UP.com

Read it!

[illegible]

Hear it!

[illegible]

Watch it!

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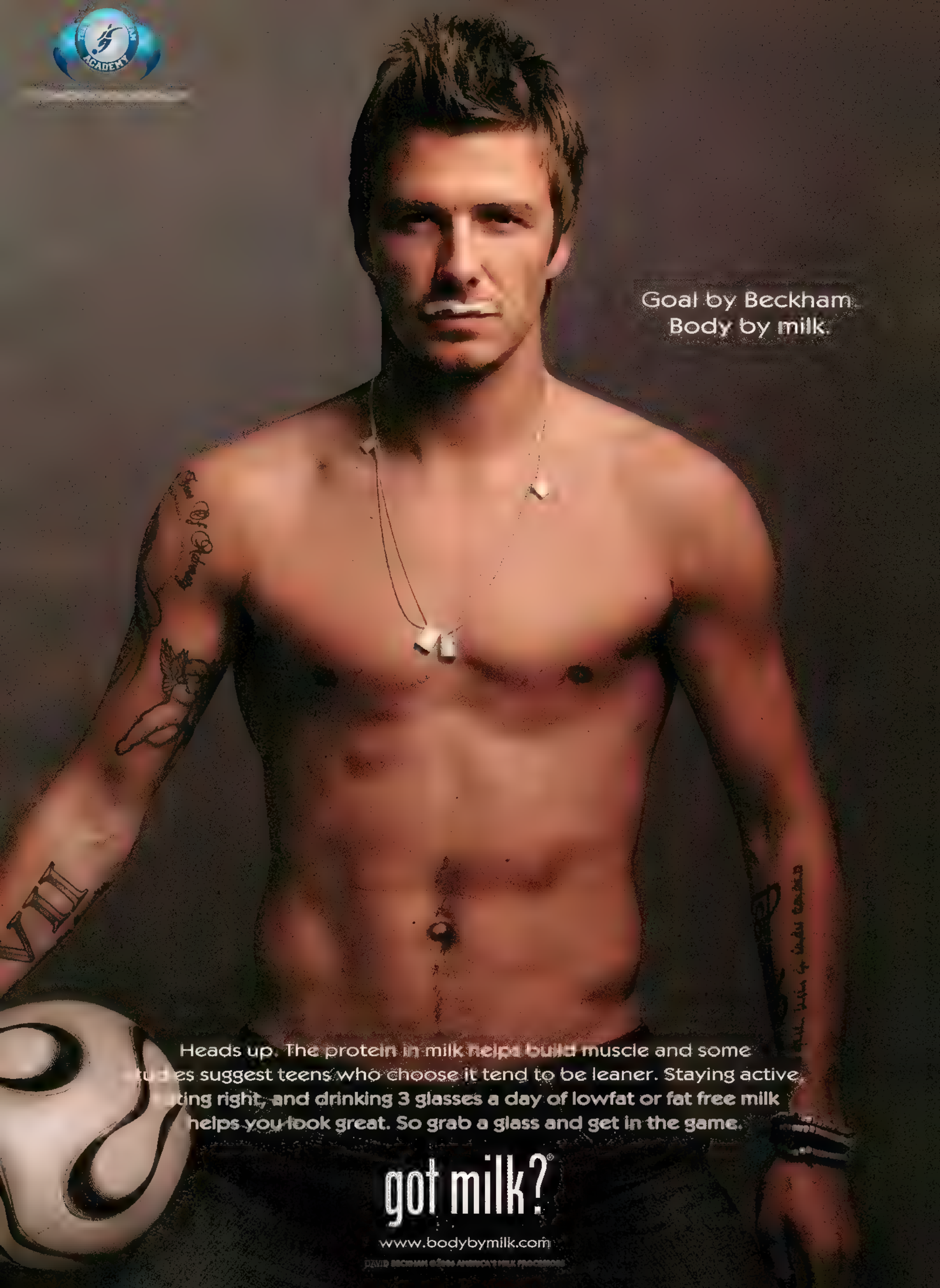
DON'T EXPECT ANY SHORTAGES FOR THE WII—NINTENDO ANNOUNCED IT'S STILL SET TO SHIP 6 MILLION SYSTEMS BY MARCH 2007.... >>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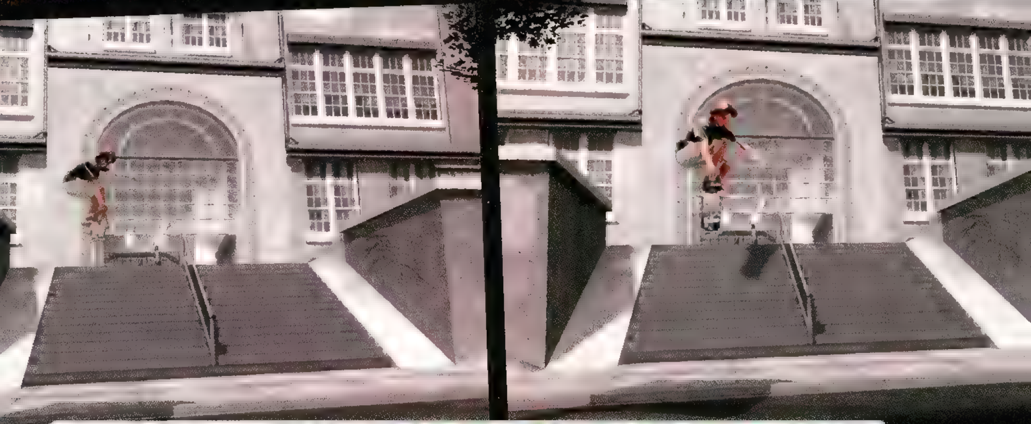


take this job: hardcore edition

HALFPIPE DREAM

Meet a player so good at his favorite game, he got hired to make it...

The story is the basis for countless daytime TV commercials: Two guys are playing a game when one of them says, "Hey, I could make a better game than this." The pitch is usually for some game-design college that may be your nonaccredited path to living your dream of designing games as a career. For at least one level designer at *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series developer Neversoft, though, the path from couch to designer didn't involve college—it just involved playing one game really well.

Andy Gentile was a major *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* fan from the moment he got his hands on the game's first demo in 1999. From then on, he played the games obsessively, racking up monster scores and posting videos of his 15 million-point combos online. He also posted often at the Delphi forums for the game—a haunting ground for members of the Neversoft team—and hung out with the developers when playing *THPS3* online.

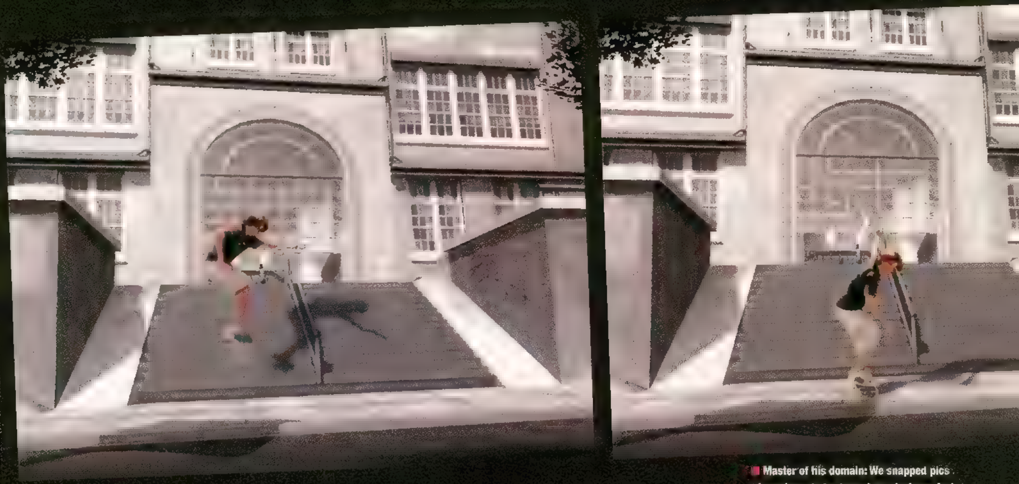
So when a player with the handle "AndyTHPS" ran into a group of Neversoft developers trying to manual down a tricky, wavy staircase in the Los Angeles level of *THPS3*, he wasn't exactly a stranger. Still, when it took Gentile only two tries to complete the task the developers had been at for over an hour, they were impressed. When a game tester position came up at Neversoft, Gentile's skills came to the front of the developers' minds.

So, in 2003, at the ripe old age of 16, Gentile headed from his home in Houston to Woodland Hills, CA, to spend the summer before his senior year of high school helping Neversoft test out *Tony Hawk's Underground*. "I remember waking up that morning not knowing what time to actually come in," Gentile says of his first day at the office. "I got in an hour early and walked around aimlessly. I was extremely ecstatic just seeing all this skateboarding memorabilia on the walls, seeing all this technical equipment everywhere, and walking past the conference tables that I'd seen the employees of Neversoft skate on during the in-game credits of *THPS3*."

After a second summer testing out *THUG2*, Gentile had his foot firmly planted in the door with a full-time testing position. From there, he took the initiative to make the jump to level designer. "One day I walked into [*THPS* Lead Designer] Alan Flores' office and said 'Hey, I'm gonna

You can check out Gentile's work in *Tony Hawk's Project 8* (for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 this November). The school and slums are his areas.

>> ROLE-PLAYING GAME PUBLISHER ATLUS IS EXPORTING YET ANOTHER BIZARRO JAPANESE ADVENTURE. IT ANNOUNCED THAT *ETRIAN*



Master of his domain: We snapped pics of amateur skater turned pro designer Andy Gentile, then inserted him into a level he made for *Tony Hawk's Project 8*. Now that's meta!

use this time I have to learn 3D Max and build levels for the game,'" Gentile says. Flores agreed, and Gentile was on his way, despite having no formal game-design education or experience, and the self-admitted fact that he "hardly knew anything about the game as far as development goes."

Gentile chalks up his survival as a rookie designer to his deep knowledge of the game and the supportive environment at Neversoft. "I had made a lot of friends working with the people at Neversoft and some of the closest ones were in the design department," he says. "They're always willing to help anyone if they need it and are totally positive." The help let him flourish into a designer of levels that Flores says appeal to the "broad spectrum of experience that players of our games have." But then, Gentile is a player himself.

Despite his path to success, Gentile is quick to recommend that others who want to follow in his footsteps should stay in school. "You can take the initiative and learn all that stuff on your own," he says, "but of course it's a plus to have a college diploma under your belt." Flores agrees, calling Gentile the "exception rather than the rule," and noting that "for every person in the game industry who hasn't gone to college, there are another 50 who have."

Good advice, but take it from us—do the extra work and spring for a college that doesn't advertise on daytime TV.

—*Kyle Orland*

"...it's a plus to have a college diploma under your belt."

—*Neversoft Level Designer Andy Gentile*

ALSO LIVING THEIR DREAMS...

Gabe and Tycho – Penny Arcade

In 1998, these two lifelong gamers started a gaming webcomic in their free time (www.penny-arcade.com). Now with over 2 million page views daily, they make their living writing and drawing about games.

Jess Cliffe and Minh Le – Valve

This pair of programmers designed and built the *Counter-Strike* mod to *Half-Life* on their own time during college. After the mod's explosive success, they were hired by Valve as designers in 2000.

Michael Adzijevic – Video Game Buddy

In 2000, after five years on Wall Street, hardcore gamer Michael Adzijevic quit his big-money job to start his own game store—Video Game Buddy in Astoria, NY. Now with two locations, Adzijevic's dream is still going strong and defying the huge, corporate game-store chains.

ODYSSEY—A DUNGEON CRAWLER DIRECTED BY THE DUDE WHO GAVE US *TRAUMA CENTER*—WILL HIT THE DS IN 2007.... >>

XB360 **PREVIEW: HANDS-ON**

DEAD OR ALIVE: XTREME 2

Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: Team Ninja
Release Date: November 2006

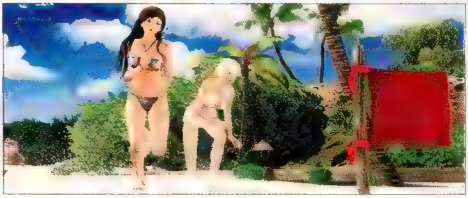
Boy toys of summer

Team Ninja may make awesome, balls-to-the-wall action games like *Ninja Gaiden*, but over the years, the developer has received much more press for showing skin... of its game characters. That came to a head with the 2003 *Dead or Alive* spin-off *Xtreme Beach Volleyball* for the Xbox, which Team Ninja front man Tomonobu Itagaki described to us as "a unique, easily approachable, and—in a sense—not as serious style of game." The sun-splashed sequel heats up the 360 this November, and even though it keeps pushing the sexual overtones, *Xtreme 2* has more to it than a bunch of pretty faces.

Whereas volleyball acted as the main venue in the first game, Jet Ski racing fills that role here—girls hop atop big engines and hit magnificently rendered (and realistic) waves to run races and perform stunts. The controls are smooth and simple, but you'll still find a good amount of depth; successfully negotiating a sequence of flags nets a crucial bit of boost, yet the shifting surf can make things stressful. Itagaki quickly reminds us, though, that relaxing remains the overall goal. "There are no real penalties or restrictions on the races," he says. "So if you don't care about getting first and just want to ride around, you can."

This laid-back approach extends throughout each of the game's other events, too. Volleyball returns spiffed-up and sporting a new camera, and activities such as Butt Battle, Tug-o-War, and the Pool Hop are easily accessible tests of reflex, nerves, and (surprisingly) strategy. Newcomer Beach Flag, though, is more of a button-mashing competition with an emphasis on rhythm in which the loser of the race eats a face full of sand. Yet whichever activities you choose, it's always key to respect the girls for their ➤

■ Yeah, the view looks good from up there. Very good.



BROADBAND BEACHCOMBERS WILL BE HAPPY TO HEAR THAT LIVE SUPPORT IS SLATED FOR ONLINE JET SKIING AND VOLLEYBALL ACTION....

ULTIMATE AGILITY

DEAD OR ALIVE: XTREME 2 (CONT.)

minds as well as their bodies. For instance, while an aggressive nature might make for a better partner at volleyball, coyer gal pals are more likely to let go—instead of violently tug—their end of the rope.

Although this *DOA* offshoot may seem out of tune with Team Ninja's more brutal offerings, Itagaki's own informal rules of game design argue otherwise: "First, a game must be so appealing that you immediately want to play. Second, once you play it, it's fun. And third, once you're enjoying it, it's *so* fun, you can't stop." Only a closer look under *Xtreme 2*'s hood will reveal whether this beauty proves to be a keeper, but already Itagaki and company have got the first two points well in hand.

—*David Chen*

NOT-SO SILENT ASSASSIN

The ever-candid Tomonobu Itagaki, head of developer Team Ninja, takes time to ruminate—and illuminate

Research for *Xtreme 2* must've been *real* tough on Itagaki.

EGM: Looking back at your portfolio, what's the one thing you'd most like to change?

Tomonobu Itagaki: Anytime you make something out of nothing—a game or anything else—there are hundreds of decisions you have to make. Depending on whether you picked choice A or choice B, you end up with a totally different product. There's always the "what if?" in looking back—that just comes with the territory.

My personal philosophy is that I make decisions on the run. A lot of people spend too much time thinking about which foot to put forward. I'm constantly moving—I've got to make decisions as I go. It's precisely because I have that style that *Dead or Alive* is the series it is 10 years later.

EGM: You're known for pissing on the competition...and doing it well. Let's play nice: What are some of your favorite things about *Tekken*?

TI: [*Long pause*] The only good thing about *Tekken* is the title—it's short.

EGM: Ouch. OK, so you're one of the most prominent and successful supporters of the 360 in Japan, where—to put it lightly—it's tanking....

TI: Microsoft needs to make a good impression with how it presents the 360 in Japan. From a purely technological and pricing standpoint, it's the best choice you can possibly make—there's no reason not to buy one, in terms of what the machine can do. But the impression people have is that it's not something they can easily go out and buy and hook up in their living room.

Over the last couple of years, I've probably bought eight Canon cameras, but not a single Nikon. Why is that? Neither brand is inherently superior; they're both good cameras. But I've never had any incentive to switch brands—I just like Canon. Microsoft needs an image that makes a Japanese person say "Hey, I like the Xbox 360. I'm comfortable with this brand."

EGM: Let's talk about motion-sensing controllers. Do you see this feature as an inevitably intrinsic aspect of gaming in five years' time, or is it just a novelty? And how does that affect your work?

TI: Games are all about input from the player and output from the game. Obviously, increasing the number of inputs increases the number of possibilities. What makes videogames fun is that the output the game gives you is many more times more impressive than the input—you push one button, and your character does amazing things.

That formula starts to break down as the inputs get greater. If you have to shake the controller madly, you're upping the input for the same output. When you get to a point where the balance favors the input, and the output remains the same, "well, if I have to do all this jumping around, then I might as well ride a real Jet Ski."

EGM: Speaking of kids, you've mentioned in the past collaborating on a DS game with your daughter....

TI: My daughter still comes up to me all the time and asks when I'm going to make a DS game, because she's still young enough to think that a game is something you can make instantly.... Right now, Team Ninja's working on a DS game.

EGM: Is it a *Dead or Alive* spin-off, or something else?

TI: It's an action game.

EGM: That's all you're gonna say?

TI: Yes. This is why I said what I said earlier about the input/output ratio. I've been thinking a lot about the DS—just because you have touch-pad technology doesn't mean you have to use it for everything.

EGM: C'mon—anything else?

TI: You'd asked earlier if I could go back ten years in time, what would I change? There was a time in my life when I was thinking about getting out of the game-design business. I was working on the PS2 port of *DOA2*, and I was really unhappy with it. A PS2 launch title in three months? I should never have contemplated that—I needed four.

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Turn off the vapid, jailbait musings of preteen video bloggers and tune into www.GameVideos.com/egm, where you won't find any monologues about how cute Liam in geometry class is. Just a collection of the greatest game-related clips in the history of the Internet. —***Demian Linn***

WTF

The Loneliness of Pyramid Head

This short film by "CreativeGuy" chronicles a day in the life of *Silent Hill*'s Pyramid Head. It ain't easy being evil personified. The lawn still needs mowing, for one.

OMG

A different stroke

Okami didn't always have its stylized cartoon look—check out this exclusive clip of the early, "realistic" version of the game's intro compared shot-for-shot with the final edition.

LOL

Mario Bros. vs. Evil Ken and Ryu

Mario and Luigi get no mercy from Ken and Ryu in this cross-franchise battle for the ages. Made with Mugen, a PC 2D-fighting-game engine that lets you create your own characters and stages (search for "mugen" on GameVideos.com for more).

DEADRISING
SECRETS

1337

Dead Rising Secrets

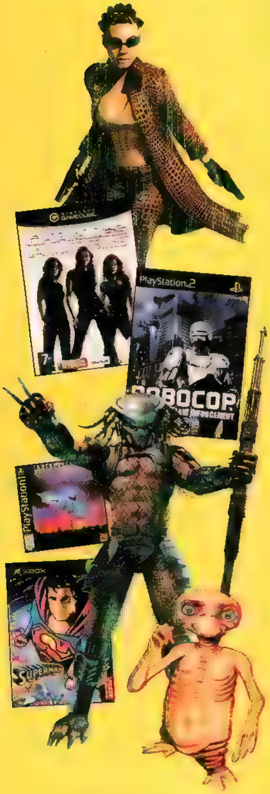
From the submachine gun hidden in a palm tree in the entrance plaza to the elusive and lucrative frying-pan bonus, we've got the skinny on *Dead Rising*'s most arcane seeeecrets.

>> EACH *DOAX2* GAL WILL HAVE 30-PLUS UNIQUE SUITS, FOR A WHOPPING TOTAL OF OVER 300.... >>

ULTIMATE
WEAPON

LICENSE TO BUZZKILL

Five reasons games based on movies, toys, and TV shows almost always suck...



■ **Which of these things is not like the other? Er, none—they're all proof that licensed games and characters may induce vomiting.**

You've heard the horror stories: landfills piled high with Atari *E.T.* cartridges, *Superman 64* ruining the value of your DC Comics collection, and the mere mention of entering a "matrix" inciting seizures. Licensed games' sordid past is enough to make any gamer think thrice about playing anything tied to a hot property. But as development costs rise, such games are an appealing safety net for publishers who can count on licensed content for easy profits. Let's hope the publishers pay attention to these reasons licensed games so often go wrong.... —*Mary Jane Irwin*

Reason 1: They're just products

As Scott Rogers, creative manager at THQ, explains, the target audience of these games is made up of fans who buy the toys, the clothing, and the shampoo, so licensed games are often treated as mere marketing extensions of a parent product. Peter Wanat, an executive producer at publisher Vivendi Games, adds, "[Developers know] that if we [have] the license for X property, we're going to be able to sell a certain number of units because we'll put it on TV. We'll market it and we'll target it to kids because you know they are far less discriminating."

Reason 2: They have to ship by the premiere

When a game is tied to a movie, the developer is encouraged to ship by the film's theatrical release. "You've got to hit your ship date because you're depending on the marketing push of the movie—that window of buzz," says Cam Weber, senior producer at *Scarface* developer Radical Entertainment. On such tight schedules, developers are forced to choose between fixing bugs and adding features. Neither choice benefits the consumer. "You're cutting quality," Weber says. "You're cutting depth and features to try to make a date."

Reason 3: The bully factor

When you're in charge of a licensed game, you're caretaking someone else's intellectual property. Whether dazed by star power or intimidated by the power tie, developers are frequently compelled to comply with the suits' wishes, even at the detriment of the overall product. "Producers are so anxious to just please their counterparts on the Hollywood side that they basically get bullied," Wanat says. "Then the game comes [out], and the producer is caught like a deer in headlights when he realizes he way overpromised what he can deliver."

Reason 4: They suffer from copycat syndrome

These days, it seems like every other game is modeled after *Grand Theft Auto*. In the world of licensed-game production, borrowed gameplay mechanics are even more commonplace. "You don't have time to innovate," says Weber, "so what you get is a lot of very safe, very tried-and-true features that are either copies from other games or stuff that the team has done before with a license slapped on top of it."

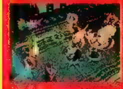
Reason 5: They clone the flick

Consumers buy licensed games because they offer an extension of a beloved property's universe—an experience that goes beyond what the camera captures. But more often than not, this concept translates into experiencing *exactly* what you've watched at the theater or on TV. "You saw the f***ing movie," Wanat points out. "If you play a game where you saw the movie already, you know how it ends. What f***ing fun is that?"

TWO GAMES THAT GOT IT RIGHT

The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay (XB)

Escape from Butcher Bay filled one of the biggest gaps in the Riddick storyline—his origin story.



X-Men Legends II: Rise of the Apocalypse (PS2/XB)

Built for co-op brawling, the game also gets a shot of action/role-playing mutagen.

TWO GAMES THAT GOT IT OH-SO WRONG

Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs. Death (PS2/XB/GC)

With its repetitive gun toting and vampire slaying, this Judge is certainly dreadful.

Batman Begins (PS2/XB/GC)

Whereas the Dark Knight drops in from above to scare villains, you'll find no batty surprises in this movie-plot on-rails adaptation.

GAMER EQUATION

Batter up

Motion-sensing controller...

+

...Wii Baseball...

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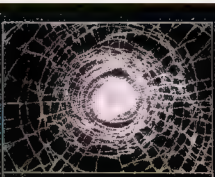

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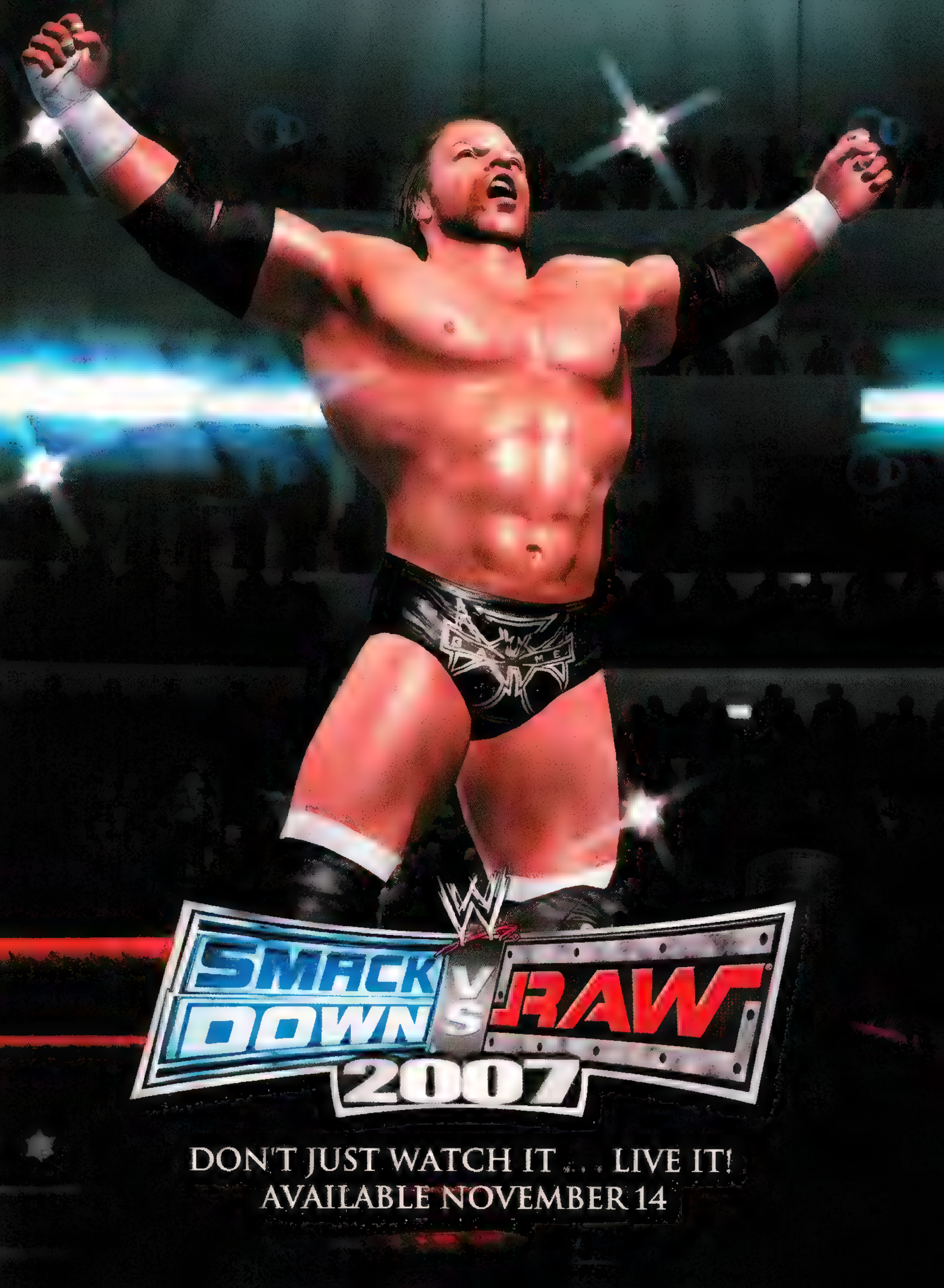
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PS3 **PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE INFO**

HEAVENLY SWORD

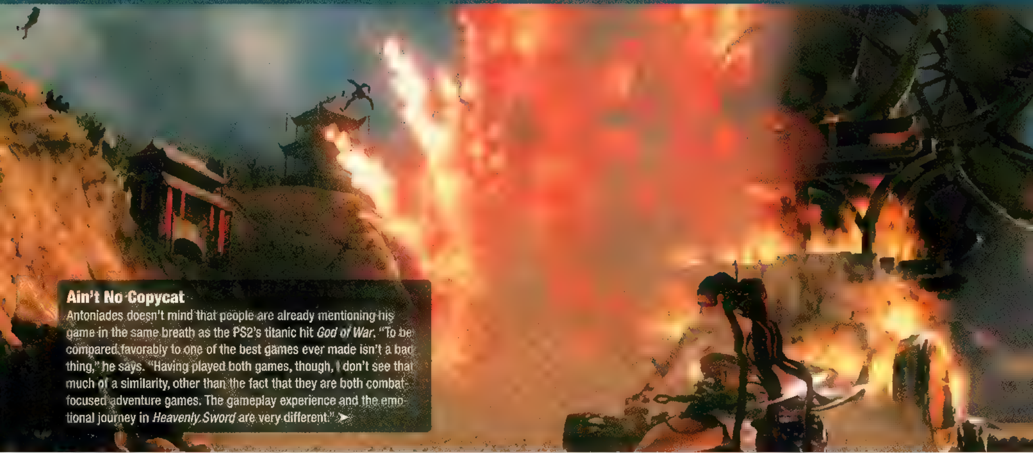
Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Ninja Theory
Release Date: Winter 2007

The PlayStation 3's angelic face is quite the ball-buster

Two minutes. That's all it took for developer Ninja Theory to prove that its supremely stylish action-adventure game *Heavenly Sword* wouldn't be another *Kung Fu Chaos* (XB), its previous (and positively dreadful) project. The short demo shown this past spring featured Nariko, the game's redheaded leading lady, displaying her stellar acrobatic skills, big, bad weapons, and uncanny knack for ending her enemy's day in the combat arena with a whack to the family jewels.

Still, 120 seconds of gameplay left potential PS3 owners with a lot of questions: Is this just *Goddess of War*? What's the game like outside of the arena? How smart are these bad guys? And what's this about Gollum helping make it? Tameem Antoniades, Ninja Theory's cofounder, provides the answers on its first next-gen entry.

—*Bryan Intihar*



Ain't No Copycat

Antoniades doesn't mind that people are already mentioning his game in the same breath as the PS2's titanic hit *God of War*. "To be compared favorably to one of the best games ever made isn't a bad thing," he says. "Having played both games, though, I don't see that much of a similarity, other than the fact that they are both combat-focused adventure games. The gameplay experience and the emotional journey in *Heavenly Sword* are very different." ➤

>> THIS FALL, SAM SNEAKS TO THE WII—UBISOFT RECENTLY ANNOUNCED *SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT* FOR NINTENDO'S NEW CONSOLE.... >>

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HEAVENLY SWORD (CONT.)

The Bigger Picture

Even though *Heavenly Sword*'s demo was effective, its brevity and limited scenery shouldn't be mistaken as the full scope of this game. "The demo was a confined space, which was just a tiny part of a much larger roaming landscape," explains Antoniades. "There is a range of gameplay going from 1-on-1 boss fights to fighting against whole battalions of enemies, featuring a medley of weapons at your disposal—from dead bodies to explosive firework-propelled bazookas that can take out huge swathes of enemies." The game will also have some adventure aspects (details are still unknown), but you won't find any platforming segments here. After climbing *God of War*'s utterly frustrating columns of blades, keeping Nariko grounded is definitely a good thing.

Wise Guys

Even though we've seen Nariko easily wipe the floor with her foes, Antoniades promises that not every encounter will be so one-sided. "When you are fighting against a group of enemies, they coordinate their attacks into what we call 'group combos,'" he says. "It's an A.I. system that tightly choreographs individual enemies into a group intelligence that can adapt to how you play. Our focus is to create, above all, fun A.I. that reacts to you in a believable way. So enemies will cheer, jeer, and taunt you as you fight. Morale also comes to play as you do things like kill an enemy's best friend."

Guest Developer: Gollum

Actor Andy Serkis, who's best known as *Lord of the Rings*' "precccious" star, Gollum, is getting really involved in *Heavenly Sword*'s development. In addition to doing the motion capture of the main villain, "he has directed the dramatic elements of the game," says Antoniades. "We worked with him on initial technology tests, the direction of scenes, putting together a truly talented cast, editing, writing, and even music."

Heavenly Sword may also include Xbox 360-like in-game achievements.

>> WHAT ABOUT *HEAVENLY SWORD* AND ITS PS3 MOTION-SENSING FEATURES? DEVELOPER NINJA THEORY IS STILL FIGURING THAT OUT.... >>

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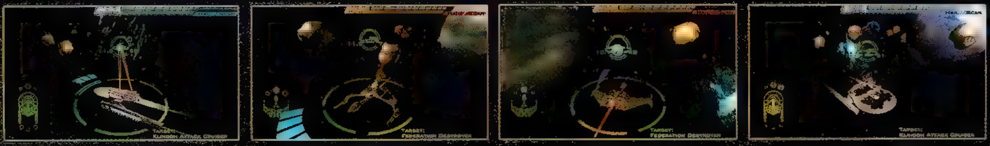
PSP screens shown

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RODRIGUEZ
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OFF THE WALL

TEEN

T

Blood
Crude Humor
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Mild Violence

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■ Whoa—Col. Roy Campbell sure rocked the Andy Gibb look in 1970.

PSP / **PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS**

METAL PORTA

Konami lays off the acid and gives gamers a Snake suitable for a plane

Don't worry, *Metal Gear Solid* fans—this new PSP *Gear* isn't another confusing, card-based strategy title like those pesky *Metal Gear Ac!d* games. Nope, *Portable Ops* is the genuine article—a legitimate single-player *MGS* stealth-action adventure, augmented by an all-new squad-based online multiplayer mode. Fans should prepare for a virtual *MGS* family reunion, as you recruit, control, and wirelessly trade a huge cast of series stars.

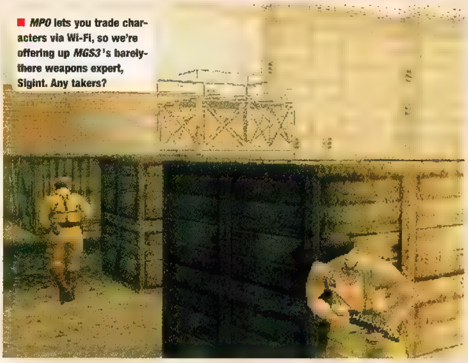
Filling in the blanks

Despite the fact that it's not a proper, numbered *MGS* title, *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops* (*MPO*) fits snugly into the series' overarching story line. The story kicks off roughly six years after *MGS3*'s climactic finale—you once again play as Naked Snake (aka Big Boss), the genetic father of *MGS* hero Solid Snake. At the game's outset, he awakes in a military prison located deep within a South American jungle. After a hasty escape, you're briefed on the true crisis: His former allies, the FOX unit, have stolen nuclear warheads from the CIA and plan to start a war by aiming them at the U.S.S.R. Oh, and they're building a new Shagohod (the massive Metal Gear prototype from *MGS3*). Gee, some friends they are.

With the help of a young Roy Campbell (Solid Snake's commander in *MGS1*), Snake sets out to stop his renegade comrades by amassing a new team of operatives called FOXHOUND (sound familiar?). It's certainly an intriguing setup, and one that should finally patch some big holes in the overall *MGS* narrative. How does Big Boss go from stoic patriot to power-hungry despot? We should finally get some solid answers here....

Welcome to the team

At first glance, *MPO* seems to play exactly like *MGS3*: You're snapping necks, shimmying through air ducts, and busting out brutal close-quarters combat (CQC) maneuvers like a pro. (Squeezing the complicated control scheme onto the PSP wasn't easy, though—scope the sidebar.) That familiar lone-wolf gameplay quickly subsides, however, as you realize that Snake must draft other soldiers into his regiment in order to succeed.



■ *MPO* lets you trade characters via Wi-Fi, so we're offering up *MGS3*'s barely-there weapons expert, Sigint. Any takers?

>> LEAVE YOUR PSP ON SLEEP MODE AND YOU CAN AUTOMATICALLY EXCHANGE *PORTABLE OPS* RECRUITS WITH YOUR FELLOW PSP-TOTING PASS-

GEAR SOLID: BLE OPS

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Kojima Productions
Release Date: Winter 2007

Here's where things get interesting—you can recruit random grunts after interrogating them, woo major characters that appear in the single-player game (Eva, Major Zero, Ocelot, and Raikov are among the confirmed guest stars...with a massive cast of familiar faces expected), or download special characters from specific Wi-Fi access points.

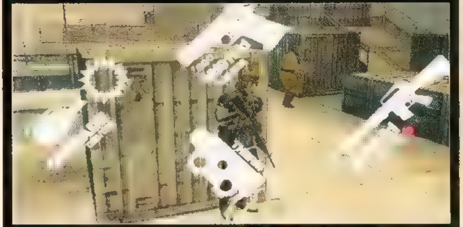
What remains to be seen, however, is just how this squad-based combat plays out in *MPO*'s single-player game. (So far, we've only had hands-on time with the decidedly familiar multiplayer action.) Offline, Konami promises that you'll be able to place your troops at various locales on the map, switch between them on the fly, and issue rudimentary commands. How will this gel with Snake's army-of-one MO? "I think you can come up with some interesting scenarios of how Snake will not go on to fight alongside soldiers but to lead a nation of them!" says *MPO* International Producer Ryan Payton.

Group dynamics

Luckily, Snake's personal army enlistment drive serves a dual purpose. "We've integrated the single and multiplayer modes so you can recruit comrades in story mode and then take them online for battle," explains Payton. *MPO*'s six-player online matches provide the perfect showcase for your personalized collection of swarthy FOXHOUND troops. For better or worse, these matches closely mimic the *Metal Gear Online* mode included in this year's *MGS3: Subsistence*—smallish maps, quirky capture-the-frog objectives, and the same slightly wonky close-quarters gunplay. This time, though, who you choose to fight as makes a more substantive difference—every character has distinct abilities and advantages, so playing as a sniper, medic, or engineer completely alters your gameplay style.

Be careful, though: *MPO* takes *Pokémon*'s gotta-catch-'em-all mentality to a crazy new level by making your troops distressingly disposable. Any character who dies in battle is gone for good (which could mean trekking back to a Starbucks Wi-Fi spot to download him again.) —*Shane Bettenhausen*

THE HARDEST BUTTONS TO BUTTON

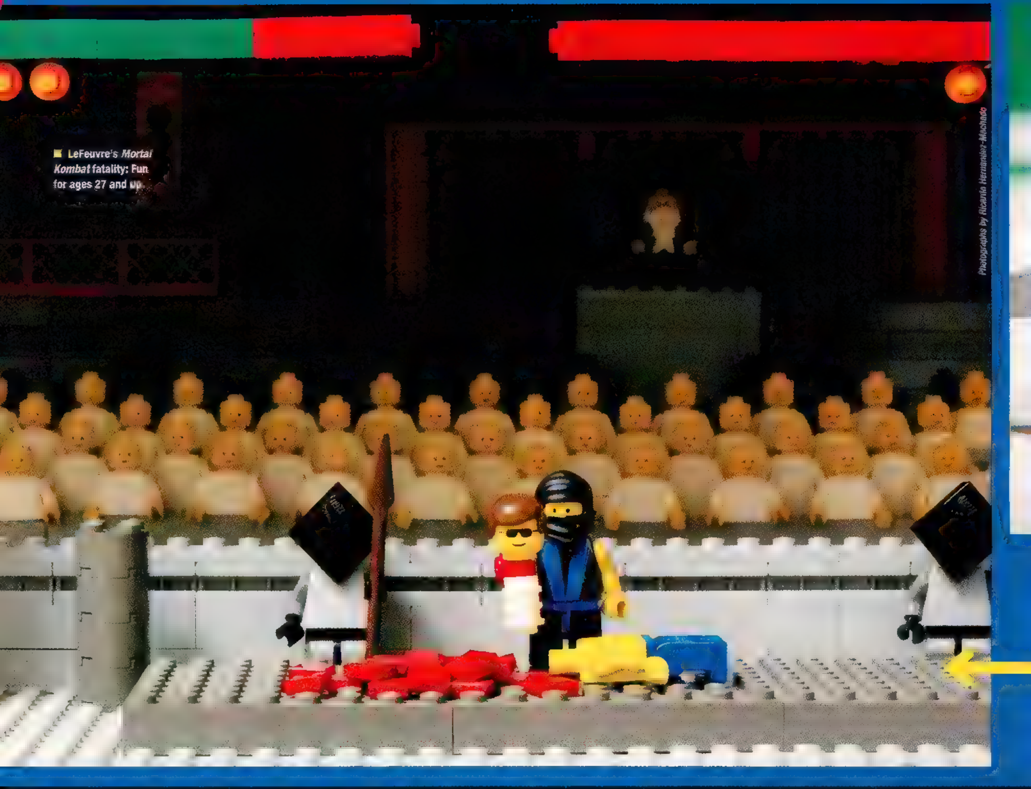


Critics who faulted *MGS3*'s controls for being overly convoluted will likely also scoff at *MPO*'s subtly reworked scheme—the loss of two buttons and an analog stick forces some creative remapping. The Circle button now brings up the new quick-change menu (pictured here) for swapping between four weapons; the Square button performs melee attacks/close-quarters combat; Triangle executes context-sensitive actions like climbing; and X still makes Snake duck or dive. The Right trigger fires your weapon, while holding down the Left trigger switches to a first-person view. Plus, you can move the third-person overhead camera with the D-pad. Easy, right?

■ *MGS3*'s grizzled mission commander, Major Zero, delivers justice AARP-style.

■ Who do we have here? Meet newcomer "Null" who looks an awful lot like Gray Fox (aka *MGS1*'s cybernetic ninja).

ERSBY. IT'S LIKE *NINTENDOGS*' BARK MODE...ONLY FOR BOYS! ...ALSO, *MPO* WILL SUPPORT SONY'S UPCOMING GPS ADAPTER FOR PSP....

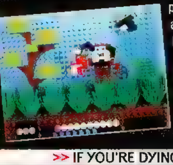


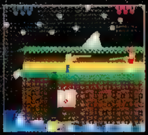
LeFeuvre's *Mortal Kombat* fatality: Fun for ages 27 and up.

Photographs by Ricardo Hernandez-Machado

LEGO MANIAC

You've heard of Lego Star Wars, but Lego...Castlevania? We challenge a real Sir Bricks-a-Lot to build us three game-inspired masterpieces...

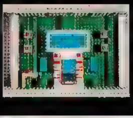




When they weren't choking us during childhood, Legos proved to be one of our coolest toys. Fortunately, fanatics like 28-year-old Ronn LeFeuvre never outgrew them; he spends his spare time re-creating screens of videogames past and present. "It began as a project in college," says the Los Angeles–based programmer. "We wanted to either do a stop-motion-video thing with Legos or a *Grand Theft Auto* parody." He did both.

In the innocent world of Legos, where plastic bricks normally build cute little pirate ships or a home for SpongeBob, LeFeuvre's twisted mind had him clicking together classic *GTA* scenes of car bombs and street shootings (check out www.brickflick.com). When players exposed the scandalous Hot Coffee sex mod, however, LeFeuvre was done with his *GTA* phase and didn't feel the need to build hot brick-on-brick action. Instead, the masterful toy-block architect decided to throw together screens of old games, such as *Duck Hunt* (far left) and *Contra* (left), and post them online—instantly gaining fame in the blogosphere.

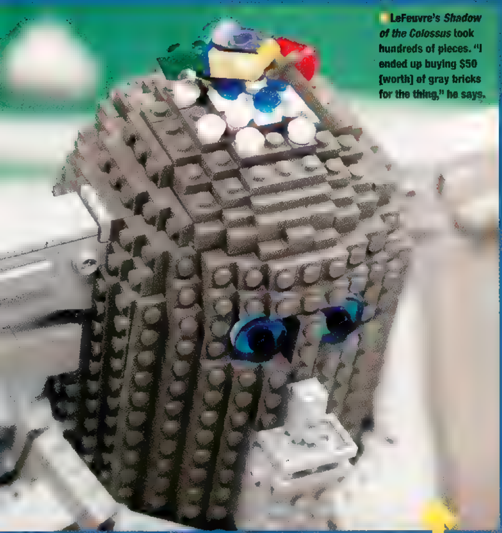
We decided to put him to the test, giving him a month to build three games: *Castlevania*, *Mortal Kombat*, and—because we're sadistic bastards—*Shadow of the Colossus*. Check out the results above, then heed his five tips for doing your own Lego thing....



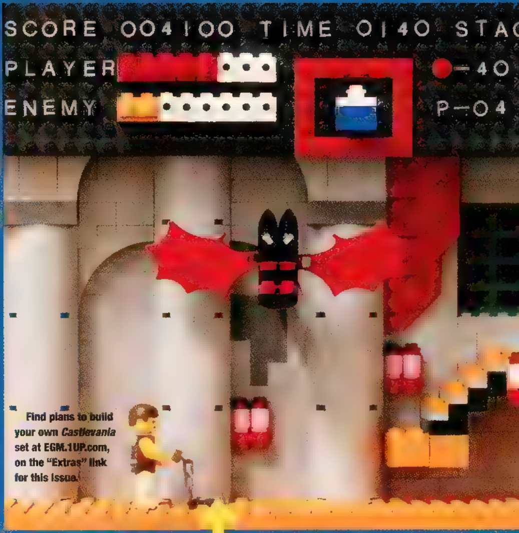
1 Avoid high-maintenance games

"I was surprised that *GTA* was easier than my Nintendo stuff," LeFeuvre says. "Old Nintendo games are hard because they pack so much detail in low-res screens. It's hard to capture a friggin' icon, for instance. Stick with more modern games; they're easier. Nintendo's *Bionic Commando* is a different story (right). It ended up being 2-and-a-half feet tall when it was done."

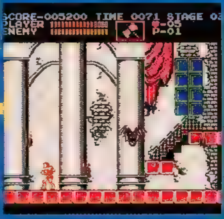
>> IF YOU'RE DYING TO PLAY AS *DEVIL MAY CRY*'S DASHING MAIN CHARACTER DANTE IN *DEVIL MAY CRY 4*, YOU MAY BE IN FOR A DISAPPOINT-



LeFeuvre's *Shadow of the Colossus* took hundreds of pieces. "I ended up buying $50 [worth] of gray bricks for the thing," he says.



Find plans to build your own *Castlevania* set at EGM.1UP.com, on the "Extras" link for this issue.

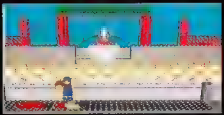


2 Set up your artist's palette

"Sit down and start sorting. You're going to need a huge set of Legos. Organize them by colors and shapes. Not every piece exists in every color; it's a lot of give and take. Try to find the textures and what matches the best. For some of my *Mario* sets, I used bricks backward...because it resembled the original Nintendo art. Pull up the screenshots and sprites on a laptop or print them up for reference."

3 Put together a blueprint

"Nintendo stuff works out well scalewise. Typically, Nintendo breaks things down into 8-pixel blocks—I translate each one of those into a 2-by-2 Lego block. Sometimes, when you can't figure out if something's going to work, a computer-aided drafting program helps. [That's] the way the *Mortal Kombat* one worked out (upper right)—I wasn't sure how well the entire thing would jell. I ended up using a [computer-aided design] program. But normally, I snap things together and see what works.



Know that gray, brown, and green blocks are really common. For example, *Castlevania*'s all gray, and *Contra*'s all brown."

4 Wipe out your social calendar

"It took me about 20 hours to get the Colossus built from nothing. For *Castlevania*, I finished a rough at around eight hours and then refined the model over a few separate weekends. I spent four hours just f***ing around on the bat. The most difficult [parts are] smaller and detailed things. I mean, that thing had eyes."

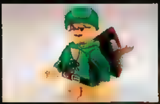
5 Don't be a cheating bastard

"[I] don't manipulate the pieces or cut them, and I don't glue anything. I ignore the crazy pieces that are newer. Stick with the basic bricks, plates, et cetera.... Limit the use of minifigs [the yellow figurines]. Even though I have three people's sets, I don't have enough, and I'm still buying bricks all the time. It's definitely not the cheapest hobby to have." —*James Lee*

If they build it, you will come

LeFeuvre isn't the only blockhead on your block. Check out...

A collection of Lego-ized figures and more from *Resident Evil* (above) to *Halo*: www.saber-scorpion.com



This Lego master has constructed *Legend of Zelda* characters: www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.cgi?f=139679

This dude built a ready-to-mount 3D duck from *Duck Hunt*: mathaeis.livejournal.com/613572.html

And finally, a guy who can turn any game controller into an oversized Lego model: nathanbrickartist.com

MENT. CAPCOM'S UPCOMING PLAYSTATION 3 EXCLUSIVE PUTS YOU IN THE KILLING BOOTS OF NERO, DANTE'S DEMONIC TWIN BROTHER.... >>

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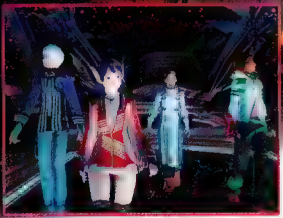

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XB360 PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS & INFO

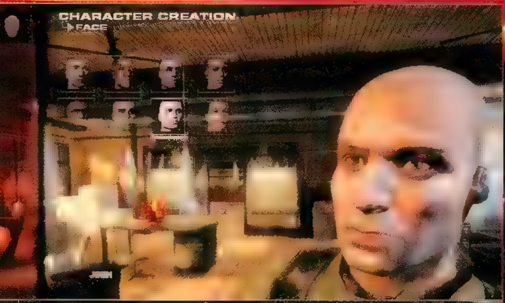
RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

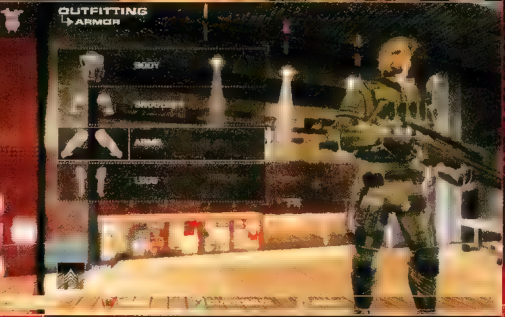
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Release Date: November 2006

What's at the end of this Rainbow? More shooting, naturally. We lick, lick, and then bite down hard to get to Vegas' multiplayer center

Multiplayer may not be the whole *Rainbow Six* enchilada but, like so many of Sin City's buffets, it's the part that has people coming back for more. And according to Lead Designer J.P. Cambiotti, you can expect an even grander meal this time. So put on your lobster bib as Cambiotti offers this peek at *Rainbow Six Vegas*' fine multiplayer spread. *—Evan Shamoon*

>> FEEL THE BURN (AGAIN) IN 2007—EA HAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE FIFTH EDITION IN THE CRASH-EM-UP SERIES *BURNOUT* WILL HEAD TO THE PS3





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Like the Xbox version of *Lockdown*, *Vegas* features Persistent Elite Creations (PEC), your personalized characters whose appearances and weapons you can upgrade as you gain rank. "There's now more depth with persistent characters," says Cambiotti. "You create your own hero, your unique online persona. You can even put your own face on that character [with the Xbox Live Vision camera]." And unlike in other multiplayer games, you don't get any ability boosts as your rank increases—just access to new weapons and gear, which Cambiotti promises won't tip the game's balance in the favor of veterans. "This new equipment is not more powerful," he says. "It simply offers you more choices."

FAN MAIL

Weapon customization and in-game accomplishments have been longtime requests from the *Rainbow Six* community, and "this is exactly what we did," says Cambiotti. "You can change the type of scope for every weapon and modify other aspects of your weapons. We've also now got lots of Xbox 360 achievements in every mode of play, from online to offline, adversarial to cooperative."

Vegas also makes its way to the PS3 this November, but Ubisoft is keepin' quiet on that version.

MODE SEVEN

Attack and Defend is *Vegas'* most significant new mode, which has you and your team disarming/protecting a bomb, finding vital intelligence (or keeping it safe), or holding/rescuing hostages. "There was no one game in particular that was used as inspiration for Attack and Defend," says Cambiotti. "One team has an objective, while the other team must prevent them from accomplishing that objective. It's a game mode that just feels so right for *Rainbow Six*."

NEW BALANCE

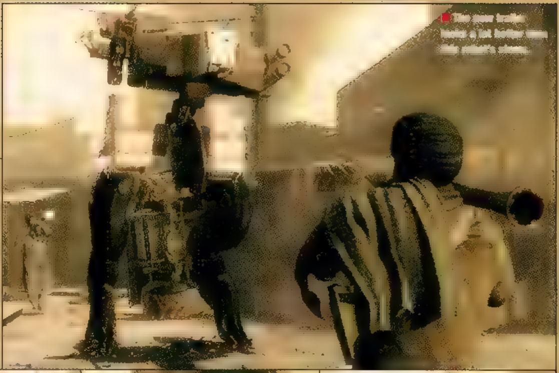
Of course, nothing's worse than coming home with a new game, jumping into an online match for the first time, and having your ass handed to you 20 times before you're able to even get off a single shot. Particularly in a *Rainbow Six* game, where "serious" players spend more hours shooting each other online than they do sleeping, eating, and bathing combined. The *Vegas* dev team is taking steps to help avoid that discrepancy. "The community was clear that they wanted an even playing field for everyone," says Cambiotti. "In *Vegas*, we're taking great strides to prevent cheating and ensure the integrity of the multiplayer experience." As mentioned earlier, the entire Persistent Elite Creation mode has been overhauled, so as your character progresses, he no longer becomes statistically more powerful.

The new iteration of Xbox Live is also a boon to decidedly hardcore games like *Vegas*. "Microsoft really helps us out in this aspect because we use Microsoft's TrueSkill rating for ranked matches," says Cambiotti. "Every time you play online you're going to be matched up against people close to your leaderboard position. This ensures the multiplayer games are always competitive and challenging."

AND XBOX 360 SOMETIME NEXT YEAR. EXPECT A MORE OPEN-ENDED EXPERIENCE WHERE WRECKS CAN NOW LITERALLY RIP YOUR CAR IN TWO.... >>

the BIG ones

They'll come out...eventually


The new trailer looks a lot better than [illegible]

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

PS3 • Konami • Fall 2007

Hideo Kojima just loves screwing with us. The series creator slyly left old fart Solid Snake completely out of the latest *MGS4* trailer (peep it at GameVideos.com). Instead, the footage shows a bunch of Middle Eastern soldiers in a nasty shootout with some dudes in modern military garb, and concludes with those odd Gekkou robots kicking the snot out of the locals and celebrating with a group-wide shart (no joke!). Is this a sneak peek at the game's multiplayer mode? Possibly...but we're not so sure about these machines and their bowel movements.

Is this Sonic's new weapon of choice?

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

Wii • Nintendo • Fall 2007

Mario versus Sonic—it's the matchup we've all been asking for. And apparently, so has legendary game designer Shigeru Miyamoto. During a recent interview, the man behind *Mario*, *Zelda*, and several other Nintendo classics said that Sega's hedgehog would be the perfect addition to *Brawl*'s cast. Now use your power and make it happen, Shiggy.

HALO 3

XB360 • Microsoft • Fall 2007

Halo 3 information continues to trickle out, as one member of developer Bungie mentioned how the anticipated first-person shooter plays, in some ways, like No. 1. "There's lots of the feel of the original *Halo*," said Frank O'Connor on bungie.net. "You'll find yourself in a huge (dangerous) and intrinsically fascinating environment and will just want to go tool around and check things out...." He also mentioned that several of the campaign mode's battles are "on a significantly bigger scale than in *Halo 2*." Bigger battles? Sign us up (just no more Libraries, please).

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

Wii/GC • Nintendo • Fall 2006

Phantom Hourglass (DS) may have slipped to 2007, but *Twilight Princess* is still on track. Yet we've got some ominous news coming out of Hyrule: You won't be able to use the GameCube joypad when playing the Wii version. And to top it off, Link's sword will now be controlled with the Wii Remote, meaning that every time you stab, swing, or swipe, you'll have to make the motions in real life, too. With *Twilight Princess* said to be of epic length, that's a whole lot of swinging for your little girly arms.

FINAL FANTASY XIII

PS3 • Square Enix • 2007

Sorry, nothing new on the *FFXIII* front this month, but here are some other franchise-related bits: Although Square Enix may appear to be firmly entrenched in the Nintendo DS camp (the DS remake of *Final Fantasy III* recently sold like mad in Japan, and new *Dragon Quest* and *Chocobo* DS games will debut there by year's end), the publisher hasn't abandoned Sony's PSP. The mysterious *FFVII* prequel, *Crisis Core*, should finally materialize in 2007, but that's not the big news—we hear that remakes of all of the old-school *Final Fantasys* (*I-VI*) will make their way to the PSP next year. It's currently unclear whether they will be sold separately or in collections....

>> EVEN HO-HUM DS GAMES ARE POPPING OUT THE SEQUELS—AN UPDATE TO THE SPACE SHOOTER *NANOSTRAY* IS IN THE WORKS.... >>

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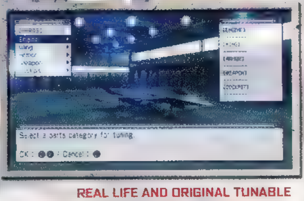
The Ace Combat® level of excellence returns in an all-new game designed specifically to take advantage of the PSP® (PlayStation® Portable) system. Enter into an entirely new highflying action-packed story that will challenge your abilities in new ways as you take on the role of an ace pilot defending the country of Aurelia. Ace Combat® X Skies of Deception brings all the realistic aircraft and combat to a new level providing intense action to any gamer on the go.

STRATEGIC AI SYSTEM THAT CHANGES ACCORDING TO YOUR IN-GAME DECISIONS



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REAL LIFE AND ORIGINAL TUNABLE AIRCRAFT TO PILOT INTO BATTLE

2-4 MULTIPLAYER WIRELESS BATTLES IN VARIOUS MODES

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

PSP® PlayStation® Portable

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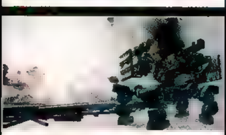
sales charts

FOR JULY
2006

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES

1	**NCAA Football 07**	PS2	EA Sports
2	**NCAA Football 07**	XB360	EA Sports
3	**New Super Mario Bros**	DS	Nintendo
4	**Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories**	PS2	Rockstar
5	**NCAA Football 07**	XB	EA Sports
6	**Cars**	PS2	THQ
7	**Brain Age: Train Your Brain In Minutes A Day!**	DS	Nintendo
8	**Big Brain Academy**	DS	Nintendo
9	**Cars**	GBA	THQ
10	**Chromehounds**	XB360	Sega

Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories



Chromehounds

Source: NPD TRSTS Video Games Service. Call (516) 625-6190 for questions regarding this list.

TOP 10 XBOX 360

1. NCAA Football 07
2. Chromehounds
3. LOTR: Battle for Middle-earth II
4. Prey
5. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
6. FIFA World Cup 2006
7. Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter
8. Fight Night Round 3
9. Over G Fighters
10. Call of Duty 2

TOP 10 PS2

1. NCAA Football 07
2. GTA: Liberty City Stories
3. Cars
4. FIFA World Cup 2006
5. Naruto: Ultimate Ninja
6. Star Wars Battlefront II
7. Guitar Hero
8. God of War
9. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
10. Midnight Club 3: DUB Ed. Remix

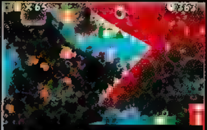
TOP 10 XBOX

1. NCAA Football 07
2. FIFA World Cup 2006
3. Halo 2
4. Star Wars Battlefront II
5. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
6. Cars
7. Fable
8. NFL Head Coach
9. Hitman: Blood Money
10. Midnight Club 3: DUB Ed. Remix

TOP 10 GAMECUBE

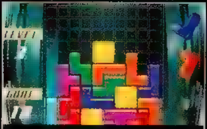
1. Cars
2. Paper Mario: Thousand-Year Door
3. Naruto: Clash of Ninja
4. Super Smash Bros. Melee
5. Mario Kart: Double Dash!!
6. Lego Star Wars
7. Super Mario Sunshine
8. Teen Titans
9. Dance Dance Revolution: Mario
10. Need for Speed Underground 2

TOP 10 PORTABLES



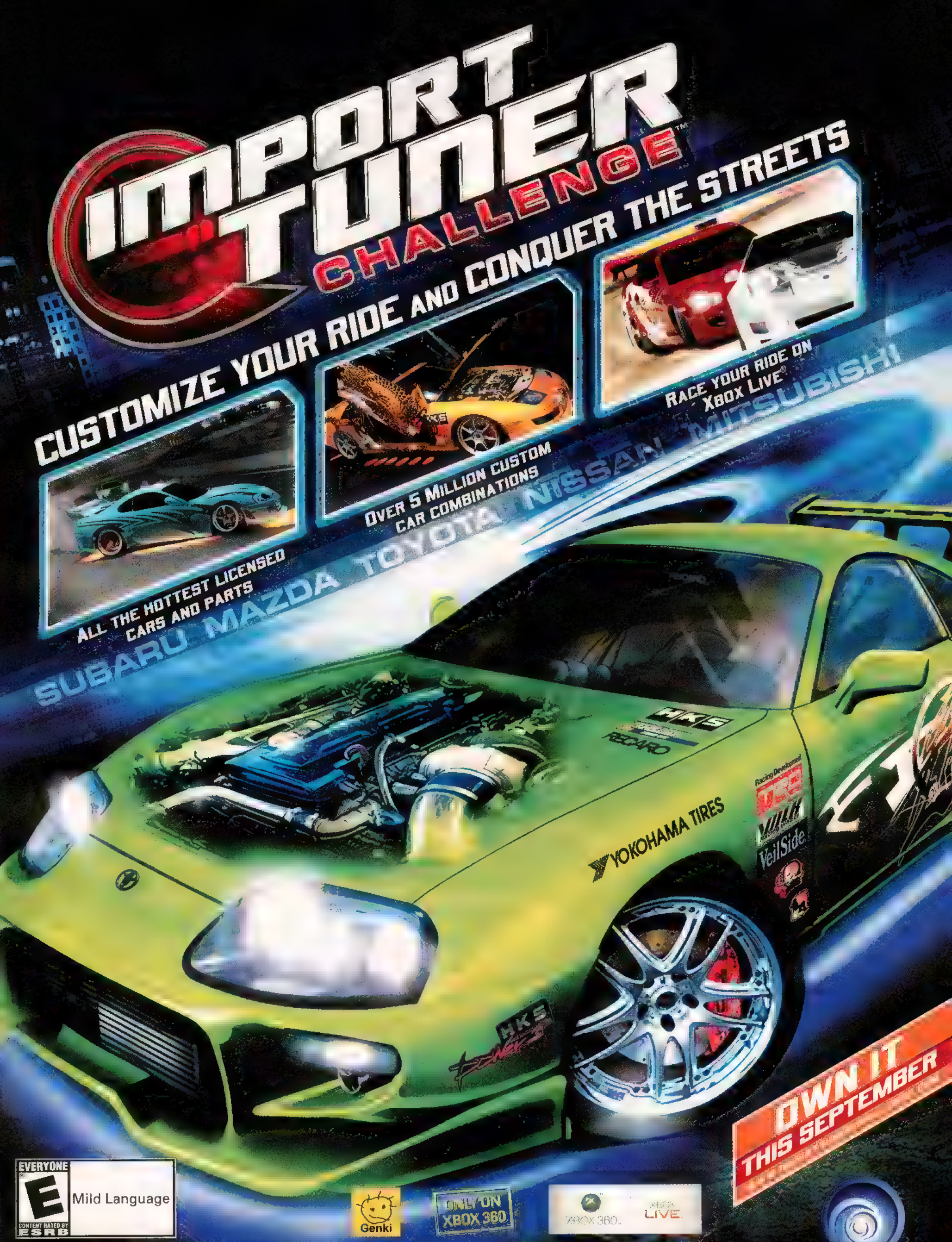
1. New Super Mario Bros. • DS
2. Brain Age • DS
3. Big Brain Academy • DS
4. Cars • GBA
5. Super Mario Advance • GBA
6. Mario Kart DS • DS
7. Animal Crossing: Wild World • DS
8. NCAA Football 07 • PSP
9. Cars • DS
10. Pokémon Emerald • GBA

TOP 10 MOBILE



1. Tetris
2. Ms. Pac-Man
3. Pac-Man
4. Bejeweled
5. World Poker Tour Texas Hold 'Em
6. Jewel Quest
7. Downtown Texas Hold 'Em
8. JAMDAT Mahjong
9. Space Invaders
10. Tetris Deluxe

>> 2K GAMES ANNOUNCED THE *FAMILY GUY* GAME WILL FEATURE THE ORIGINAL VOICE CAST FROM THE SHOW, THOUGH THAT WAS A GIVEN.... >>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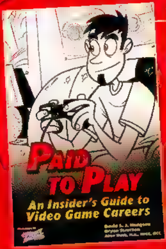
the hot 10

Ten easy steps to cultural relevance



1 PAID TO PLAY

Wouldn't you love to get paid to simply play games all day? Yeah, so would we. This funny, insightful tome by (past *EGM* contributors) David Hodgson and Bryan Stratton gives you the realistic lowdown on how to land your dream job in the videogame industry.

2 SONY THINKS PINK

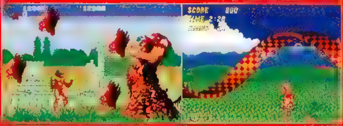
This holiday season, European gamers can indulge their love of pastels with a limited edition pink PSP (due out i October) and slimline PS2 (November). And if the cotton-candy hue doesn't unlock your inner riot grrl, the exclusive music video UMD by Grammy Award–winning artist P!nk wi So far, America seems to be spared this rosy onslaught.

3 DEVIL MAY CRY GREATEST HITS SET

Celebrate five years of stylish slashin' and shootin' with this value-priced ($39.99) bundle of all three PS2 *Devil May Cry* adventures.

4 SEGA GENESIS COLLECTION

This cornucopia of Sega's first 16-bit party classics offers over 30 games, including obvious crowd-pleasers (*Sonic 2*, *Vectorman*), fan-favorite gems (*Phantasy Star II-IV*, *Comi Zone*), and a few fossilized turds (*Golden Axe III*, *Super Thunder Blade*). Look for it on PS2 and PSP this Novemb



5 ESPN INTEGRATION DONE RIGHT

After two years of marriage, E and ESPN finally make some sweet lovin', as *NBA Live 07* will feature real NBA highlights and clips from ESPN shows like *Pardon the Interruption*.

6 TETRIS MAGNETS

Improve your spatial reasoning every time you head to the fridge for some munchies with these *Tetris*-inspired magnets. They're a bargain at $7.04 for a set of seven (available at store.artlebedev.com), and actual Russians make them. It's glasnost in action!

7 SPACE GIRAFFE

Jeff Minter, the reclusive programmer behind Atari Jaguar classic *Tempest 2000* (and the Xbox 360 audio visualizer), is readying this Xbox Live Arcade game (due out by the end of the year). Previously announced for GameCube under the name *Unity*, this music-reactive shooter looks so damned trippy that it may cause you to fail drug tests.

No Way
Oh yeah
No way!!

8 CLUBHOUSE GAMES

We're psyched for Nintendo's Wi-Fi Connection–enabled collection of over 20 timeless parlor and card games because it finally includes in-game *PictoChat* for doodling and chatting whilst you play. 'Bout damn time, Nintendo!

9 HYPERSCAN

Face it: No little brother is worth a $600 PlayStation 3. This holiday season, buy yourself a next-gen machine and surprise your li'l sibling with Mattel's value-priced ($69.99) new console that combines collectable card games with traditional videogaming. Learn more at www.hyperscangamer.com.

10 DEAD OR ALIVE MOVIE

The chicks in October's *DOA: Dead or Alive* sure look hot (spirited casting: *My Name is Earl*'s white-trash hottie Jaime Pressly as Tina!), but we're expecting the actual movie to be a steaming pile of campy crap. Hell, we were there opening day for *Doom*, *Silent Hill*, and *BloodRayne*, so we're down for this, too.

>> FRUGAL GAMERS SHOULD CHECK OUT WWW.GAMEZNFLIX.COM, A NEW NETFLIX-STYLE SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE FOR BOTH GAMES AND DVDS.... >

ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS

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PlayStation®2

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Fantasy Violence
Language

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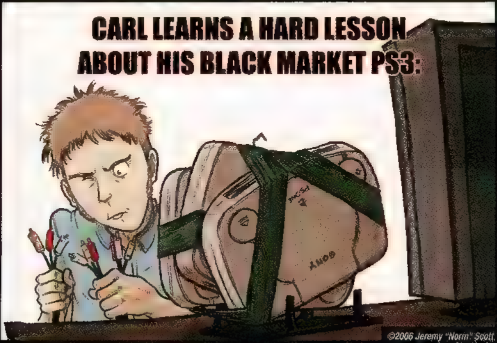
overheard

Sound bites that bite back


CARL LEARNS A HARD LESSON ABOUT HIS BLACK MARKET PS3:
SONY
PS3
SONY

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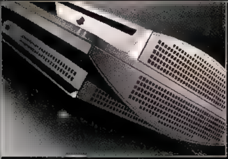
If publishers like EA shift their focus to DS, will the PSP be all washed up?

"We were excited by the [PSP's] technology, but the consumers have proven that actually what they want is fun. We must never forget that what we need to focus on is fun, so **EA is putting more effort behind DS games**—and creative ones that really take advantage of the hardware. I don't think Sony can afford to sit back. They still have things they can do with the price and performance of the machine—things that they need to address."

—David Gardner, Electronic Arts' executive VP and COO of worldwide studios, weighs in on the portable gaming war



"Our fundamental approach [to online] is different from Microsoft's. They name it Live and it's a big to-do. We look at it the other way: There's the entertainment experience, what you have in the box, all those good things, **and—oh, by the way—we have an online component.**"

—Sony Computer Entertainment America President and CEO Kaz Hirai explains his company's low-key approach to PS3's online plans

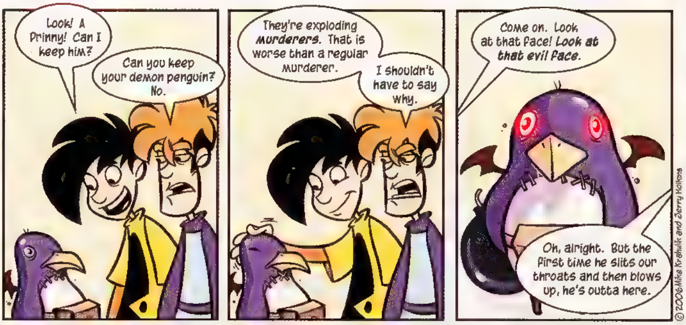
"If you're on top, you get spoiled and surrounded by cheerleaders. A few years ago, people were saying that Nintendo had slipped [out of] top place. **But actually the game market itself had lost touch with the real world**; this offered opportunities to the one who noticed first."

—*Mario* creator Shigeru Miyamoto offers insight into Nintendo's new direction while delivering an ever-so-slight dig at rival Sony

"In places like a basketball court, football stadium, or roadside in a racing game, **advertising is not only nice to have, but it's an essential component to create the fiction of being there.**"

—Chip Lange, Electronic Arts' vice president of online commerce, explains how EA's deal with Massive Inc. will "improve" gaming with real-time in-game advertising via Xbox Live

PENNY ARCADE WWW.PENNY-ARCADE.COM


Look! A Prinny! Can I keep him?
Can you keep your demon penguin? No.
They're exploding murderers. That is worse than a regular murderer.
I shouldn't have to say why.
Come on. Look at that face! Look at that evil face.
Oh, alright. But the first time he slits our throats and then blows up, he's outta here.
©2006 Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins

QUOTATION SOURCES (COUNTERCLOCKWISE, STARTING WITH OUR PSP BATH TIME PAL): MCV, WIRED, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, NINTENDO DREAM

>> XMAS COMES LATE FOR XBOX 360 THIS YEAR, AS PLANNED FALL RELEASES *FORZA 2*, *TOO HUMAN*, AND *CRACKDOWN* SLIP INTO 2007 . . . >>

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Seems *The Sims* are prepping to populate the Wii.

rumor mill

Teasing the truth

In just one month we'll all be going gaga over the PlayStation 3 and Wii. Did I say we all would? My bad! Unlike some of you dollar-burning moneybaggers out there, most of us don't swim in a sea of cash. Yep, we penny-saving peons will still be breaking our backs trying to come up with enough dough to cover the steep price of next generation "fun." But, while I may not be able afford two new consoles without donating a few dozen organs, I do have enough dirt to bury the current-gen systems for good—get a load of this month's heap. —*The Q*

Sure shot

Virtua Cop

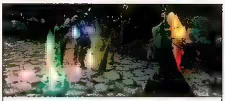
Sega isn't just known for shilling *Sonic* games; the former gaming giant used to whip up some inventive arcade games. OK, so maybe Sega's games were inventive, but the titles sure weren't—*Virtua Fighter* and *Virtua Cop* both sound like they came out of a last minute brain fart. Silly names aside, *Virtua Cop* helped shoot some life into the arcade light-gun genre. And since *Virtua Fighter* is still alive and kicking, **Sega is apparently thinking about reloading the *Virtua Cop* series onto the PlayStation 3**. Think it'll be a light-gun game? Nope! Try a first-person shooter.

Old games, new life

People like to crap on EA's creativity, but most jaded folk tend to forget the super publisher also created several cool series way before the hairy-footed hobbits and superspies took over its imagination. And since EA is focusing less on licensed games, I've heard **new versions of the motorcycle brawler *Road Rash* and the helicopter shooter *Desert Strike* are coming to next-gen consoles soon.**

Different (key) strokes

So astute rumor readers should remember I mentioned a while back that the insanely popular massively multiplayer role-playing game *World of WarCraft* is likely coming to next-gen consoles. Well, I happened to hear some gossip that supports my original claim—**it appears Microsoft has been working on a keyboard peripheral for the 360 as a way to woo developer Blizzard to make *WOW* a console exclusive**. Oh, and if that works out, I hear it'll also be making a time-machine peripheral to help players recover from loss of girlfriends, social lives, and jobs... sold separately, of course.



World of WarCraft

Simplified Sims

Sometimes living your own life can be fun, but for some reason living the lives of others seems a helluva lot more exciting...especially when you can kill peeps just as easily as you can make them fall in love. *The Sims* enabled you to control virtual lives, and now you'll apparently get to do so with the Wii Remote—**looks like a new version of *The Sims* is in the works, but this one is being made specifically with the Wii in mind.**

Q-TIPS

Football freaks who are sick of *Madden* may want to huddle up for this one—**I hear 2K is looking to score on a new next-gen football game.** How so? Well, apparently the game isn't going to feature new stars, but, instead, legends of the past.

Developer Harmonix is readying to rock gamers with *Guitar Hero II*, but I've already caught wind of its next gig—**the next game will feature multiple instruments and will be playable online.**

The 360 version of *The Godfather* may have hit stores last month, but I already got the dirt on its sequel—**my sources tell me a sequel to *The Godfather* is already in the works, but I wouldn't expect an offer until sometime in 2008.**

>> TIME-SHIFTING FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER *TIME SHIFT* IS COMING OUT A LOT FURTHER IN THE FUTURE—THE GAME'S BEEN DELAYED UNTIL '07.... >>

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PRIMA GAMES

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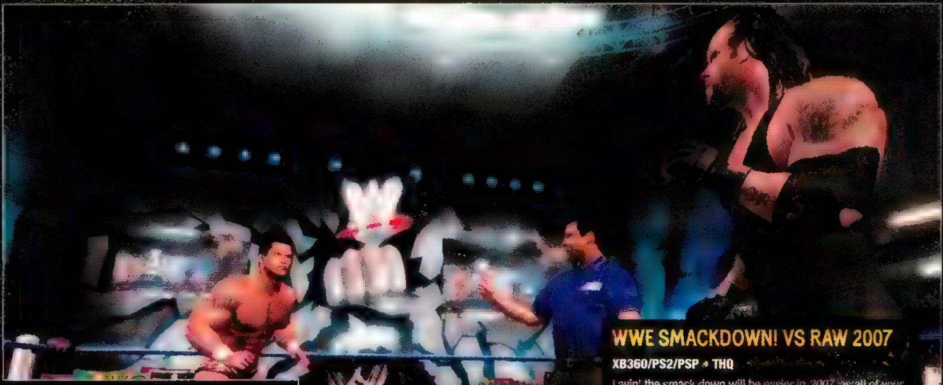
NOVEMBER 2006

coming soon

Offering thanks to the best month in gaming



WWE SMACKDOWN! VS RAW 2007

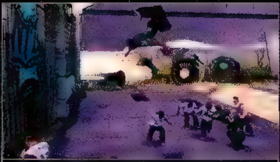
XB360/PS2/PSP • THQ

Layin' the smack down will be easier in *2007*, as all of your grapple moves in the console editions are now mapped to the right analog stick. Expect a lot of drama, too, thanks to the developers putting more emphasis on the story mode. Too bad they aren't as concerned with how these grapplers walk (they still move around like stiff action figures).

TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8

PS3/XB360/PS2/XB/PSP • Activision

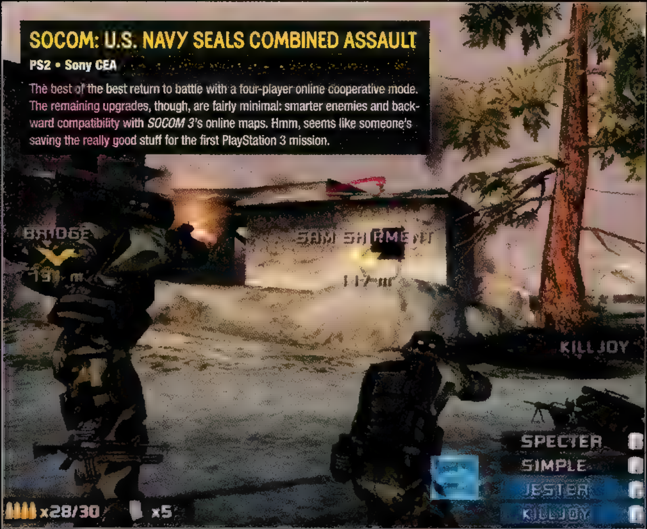
After last year's s***y port of *American Wasteland* to the 360, the Hawk finally looks and plays the next-gen part with much prettier visuals and all-new controls that enable you to slow down the action while in midair and use your feet (via the analog sticks) to kick the board in all crazy directions.



NFL STREET 3

PS2/XB/PSP • EA Sports Big

This edition of EA's *Street*-ified gridiron actually has you soaring well above it—you'll now jump into the air to collect point bonuses and move modifiers. If the new mechanic looks as silly as this screenshot implies, then we'd say the franchise, even after only three installments, is already jumping the shark.



SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS COMBINED ASSAULT

PS2 • Sony CEA

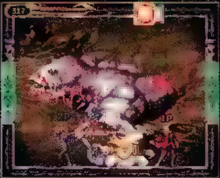
The best of the best return to battle with a four-player online cooperative mode. The remaining upgrades, though, are fairly minimal: smarter enemies and backward compatibility with *SOCOM 3*'s online maps. Hmm, seems like someone's saving the really good stuff for the first PlayStation 3 mission.

>> GABE AND TYCHO FROM THE POPULAR WEBCOMIC *PENNY ARCADE* ARE EXPANDING THEIR SATIRICAL SHTICK FROM COMICS TO—BELIEVE

F.E.A.R.

PS3/XB360 • Vivendi Games

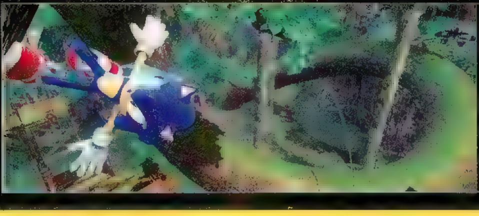
Don't let the name of this first-person shooter fool you; *F.E.A.R.* sadly keeps the paranormal scares to the minimum. Still, this PC hit comes to consoles with exclusive single-player missions that reveal more about the game's twisted story line, plus new in-game abilities like dual-wielding.



CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN

DS • Konami

Once again, Konami strikes a delicate balance between giving fans what they want (another *Castlevania* game in the spirit of legendary PS1 effort *Symphony of the Night*) and what they think they want (something besides another *SOTN* retread). *Portrait of Ruin* alters the formula with an unexpected setting (Europe during WWII), new level structure (you warp to bizarre locales via magic paintings), and an inventive dual-character system.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

PS3/XB360 • Sega

In his next-gen debut, the blue blur shares the spotlight with two other 'hogs, gun-toting Shadow and psychic newcomer Silver. And when the trio isn't fulfilling a need for speed (and falling to their doom thanks to crappy camera angles), they'll be exploring areas à la *Sonic Adventure* (Dreamcast).

MORE NOVEMBER RELEASES

BIONICLE HEROES
PS2/GC/DS/GBA • Eidos

BLADESTORM: THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR
PS3 • Koei

CALL OF DUTY 3
PS3/Wii/XB360/PS2/XB • Activision

DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME 2
XB360 • Tecmo

DRAGON QUEST SWORDS: THE MASKED QUEEN AND THE TOWER OF MIRRORS
Wii • Square Enix

ELEBITS
Wii • Konami

ERAGON
XB360/PS2/XB/PSP • Vivendi Games

FATAL INERTIA
PS3 • Koei

FIFA 07
PS3/XB360 • EA Sports

FINAL FANTASY III
DS • Square Enix

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES
PS3 • Sega

GEARS OF WAR
XB360 • Microsoft

GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE
PS3 • Sony CEA

GUITAR HERO II
PS2 • RedOctane

MADDEN NFL 07
PS3/Wii • EA Sports

MARVEL TRADING CARD GAME
PSP/DS • Konami

METROID PRIME 3 CORRUPTION
Wii • Nintendo

MOTORSTORM
PS3 • Sony CEA

NARUTO: UZUMAKI CHRONICLES
PS2 • Namco Bandai

NBA 07
PS3 • Sony CEA

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON
PS3/Wii/XB360/PS2/XB/GC/PSP/DS/GBA • EA Games

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS
PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft

RED STEEL
Wii • Ubisoft

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
PS3 • Sony CEA

SEGA GENESIS COLLECTION
PS2 • Sega

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS FIRETEAM BRAVO 2
PSP • Sony CEA

STAR TREK: LEGACY
XB360 • Bethesda

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA BLITZ
Wii • Sega

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS
Wii/GC • Nintendo

THE SOPRANOS: ROAD TO RESPECT
PS2 • THQ

THRILLVILLE
PS2/XB/PSP • LucasArts

TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM
Wii/DS/GBA • Activision

TRAUMA CENTER: SECOND OPINION
Wii • Atlus

UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM
PS3 • Sony Online

WII SPORTS
Wii • Nintendo

YOSHI'S ISLAND 2
DS • Nintendo

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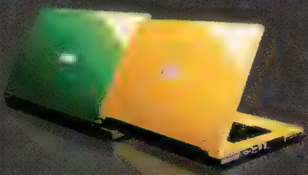

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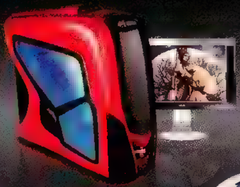

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CONTROL ISSUES

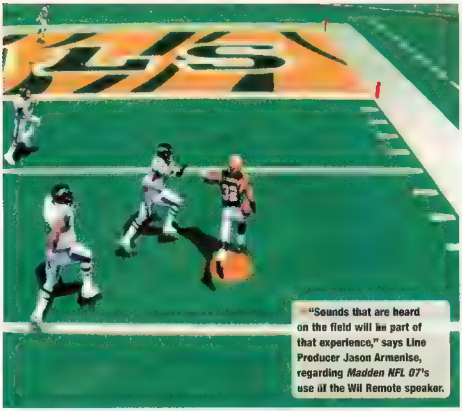
See how the Wii and the PS3's motion-sensing joypads are changing the way we play

Do yourself a favor and look inside one of your game cases. Now, see those bound pieces of paper? That's called an instruction manual. Yeah, it's been a long time since we read one of those, too.

But this fall you actually might start referring to these game manuals again. Nintendo and Sony—and their respective motion-sensing controllers—are changing the gameplaying formula (obviously, for some software more than others). Just take a look at how these dozen Wii and PS3 games are using this funky new feature....

—Bryan Intihar, Shane Bettenhausen, Greg Ford, and Paul Semel

POWER
A
HOME
1
2
Wii
SONY
SELECT



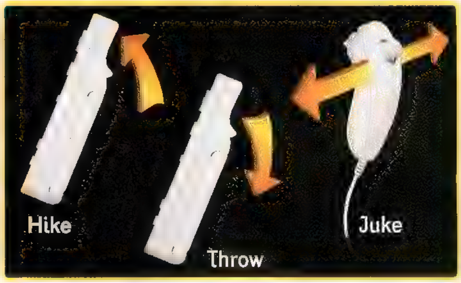
“Sounds that are heard on the field will be part of that experience,” says Line Producer Jason Armenise, regarding *Madden NFL 07*'s use of the Wii Remote speaker.

MADDEN NFL 07

Wii • EA Sports • Fall 2006

Electronic Arts may sell, like, a gazillion copies of *Madden* every year, but you'll still find a bunch of gamers out there who feel the blockbuster series has become too complicated. And who can argue? The last two major features added to *Madden*, lead blocker and the passing cone, are anything but accessible (especially the latter). But thanks to the Wii's unique play setup, the developers are aiming to simplify the virtual gridiron experience.

“Our goal from the first day has been to make *Madden*'s controls as intuitive as possible for new users,” says Line Producer Jason Armenise. “To that end, we quickly developed the idea that, in general, the Wii Remote [below on the left] should be the ‘hands’ of the player and the Nunchuk [below on the right] the ‘body.’ This plays out repeatedly in the controls.” Man, he ain't kidding—pulling back on the Wii Remote hikes the ball, moving it forward (plus pressing the D-pad) throws the ball, and swinging it left or right delivers a stiff arm. As for the Nunchuk, while its analog stick controls the player like in any other version of the game, physically moving the peripheral in various directions will perform jukes. Some onfield actions even require swinging them around simultaneously. “When you want to put a big hit on someone, you jam both controllers forward,” says Armenise. “It's the same if you're on offense when you want to power up and attempt to push through a defender.” And here's something for all you showboats out there: Flailing both controllers above your head will have ball carriers high-steppin' (or performing other taunts) on the way to pay dirt. Nice touch.

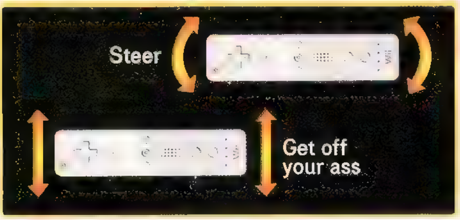


TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM

Wii • Activision • Fall 2006

The Wii's doing more than just making developers control-happy; it's also forcing them to alter the MOs of some well-known franchises. And that's just what's happening to *Tony*—instead of another open-world skate-a-thon like the upcoming *Project 8* (PS3/XB360/PS2/XB/PSP), *Downhill Jam* goes the way of a racer. You'll go around the globe participating in more than 100 events, most of which are built on speed and discovering shortcuts. The mechanics are fairly straightforward: Hold the Wii Remote horizontally like a standard controller, and tilting it left or right makes your skater turn in either direction (pressing the A button will make you power slide). Now, say during a race you take a nasty digger? Not a problem—shake the controller as fast as possible to get your guy or gal back on track.

And just because *Downhill Jam* stresses checkered flags over flash doesn't mean you won't find opportunities for gettin' tricky. A small number of challenges are all about accumulating points, and the right combo of D-pad and button presses will have you bustin' out some killer moves. ➤



1st PLACE
0:27.3
57 MPH
The Elegant Eagle
1723
SPECIAL

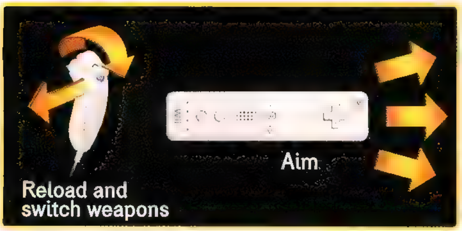
5th PLACE
2:05
180 The Power Chord
SPECIAL

Sorry, no online races here, but *Downhill Jam* will include a four-player splitscreen mode. (Not much of a consolation, if you ask us.)

CALL OF DUTY 3

Wii • Activision • November 2006

Naturally, the Wii version of *CoD3* doesn't come close to matching the PS3 and Xbox 360 editions' spectacular-looking warzones, but at least how you fight the good fight should feel fresh here. Pointing the Wii Remote at the television screen targets enemies, while moving the Nunchuk left changes weapons and jolting it upward reloads. The game also changes the feel behind *CoD3*'s wheels. "Using the Wii Remote and Nunchuk as a steering wheel held vertically at three o'clock and nine o'clock respectively," explains Executive Producer Marcus Iremonger, "the player can 'turn' the wheel as he races down bombed out streets avoiding German tanks and infantry attacks."

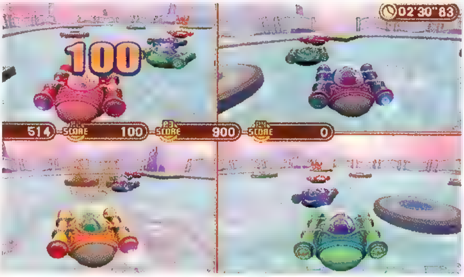


SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA BLITZ

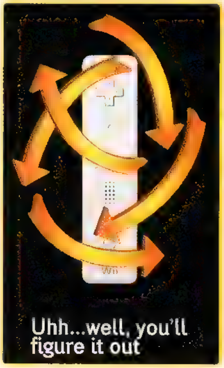
Wii • Sega • Fall 2006

Sega's quirky combo of plastic balls and simians became a monster hit on the GameCube, and unsurprisingly, *Monkey Ball* feels well-suited for the Wii. Gently tilting the controller moves your ball-bound monkey through the levels with stunning precision, while flicking the controller executes a hop (perfect for last-ditch saves and attacking bosses).

As fun as the main game may be, *Banana Blitz*'s true draw lies in 50 wildly diverse minigames. Returning favorites like Monkey Racing, Bowling, and Golf receive full control makeovers, using the motion-sensing wand precisely how you'd expect them to. But not everything is quite so predictable: Monkey Darts pulls off a shockingly accurate simulation (hold the controller like a dart, and thrust it forward while releasing a button to throw).



Extra incentive: Plowing through the solo campaign is the only way to unlock all of *Banana Blitz*'s minigames, including this four-player, space-age take on bumper cars.



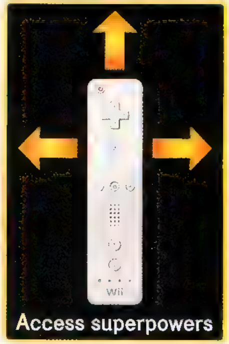
MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

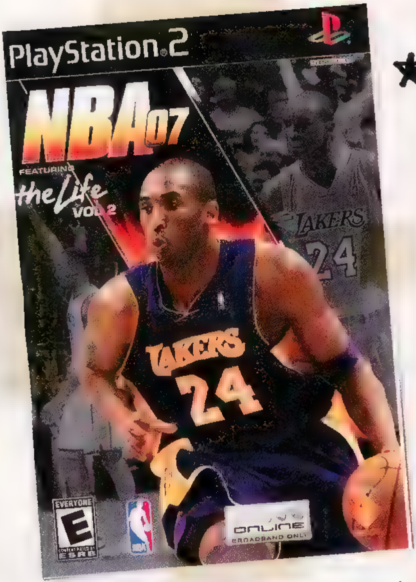
Wii • Activision • Fall 2006

Anyone who has spent a day (or more) in Underoos has probably acted out slinging Spidey's webs or throwing Captain America's shield at imaginary enemies. Well, this particular version of the superhero-heavy action-role-playing game should help bring you back to the good ol' days of sporting unflattering, brightly colored underwear.

The simple act of flicking the Wii Remote forward, backward, left, or right with a press of a button will perform superpowers like those we already mentioned. The Nunchuk, as you might expect, is used for moving your onscreen characters (via the analog stick) and adjusting the camera (via tilting the peripheral). ➤

Blade takes a break from his new (and surprisingly successful) TV series to hang with his fellow do-gooders.

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NBA 07
FEATURING the Life VOL 2
LAKERS
24
EVERYONE
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First off, I'd LIKE to say congratulations to you Kobe, for ROBBING ME of the cover for NBA 07 the LIFE Vol. 2. **It's A GREAT GAME,**
← **Should've BEEN ME on the COVER**

I FIGURED that with my VAST Knowledge of life in the NBA, **I SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE COVER ATHLETE**, But **No**, they GAVE IT to **You** Kobe. Now you're going to have to prove you earned the right to grace the cover of SUCH A GREAT GAME. **YEAH MAMBA, I'M TALKING TO YOU** and in CASE you haven't noticed, this is an INVITE TO COME tangle with me, the "MONGOOSE" FOR SOME 1 ON 1 ACTION IN LasVEGAS during ALL-STAR Break. I might even let you shoot FOR TAKE OUT. You might play 82 GAMES a season, but guess what "MAMBA", the MONGOOSE balls year round!!!!!

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Billy Joe Cuthbert
AKA the "Mongoose"

Former Guard UTAH JAZZ
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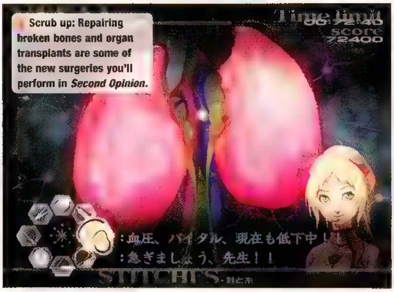
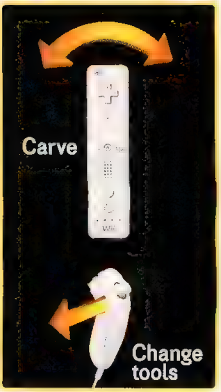


Scrub up: Repairing broken bones and organ transplants are some of the new surgeries you'll perform in *Second Opinion*.



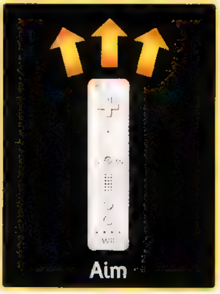
TRAUMA CENTER: SECOND OPINION

Wii • Atlus • Fall 2006

The cult DS hit *Trauma Center: Under the Knife* gave wannabe surgeons a chance to test their abilities on the operating system without actually making a bloody mess. This 3D remake (or what Project Lead Tomm Hulet refers to as a "Wii-make") now brings the virtual human carving to the big screen, and it really seems like a perfect fit for Nintendo's new console and remote controller. "The Nunchuk's analog stick serves to select your tools, and the Wii Remote and its buttons actually control it," says Hulet. "So if you need to disinfect and then cut someone open, you select the antibiotic gel, move the pointer along the incision, then select the scalpel and move back. This is a lot faster than having to select tool icons from the side of the screen in the DS version." Sadly, though, you won't hear any weird noises coming out of the Wii Remote's speaker as you poke and prod patients. "Since we are trying to make launch, there were just some features we didn't have time to implement, even though they would have been cool," confesses Hume. "The speaker is one of them."

ELEBITS

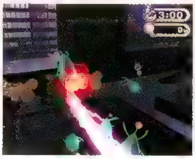
Wii • Konami • Fall 2006



Rather than grace Nintendo's new console with one of its established franchises (c'mon, wouldn't it be fun to swing a whip in *Castlevania*?), Konami has instead decided to debut this all-new property on the Wii. Meet the elebits, cuddly *Pikmin*-esque critters who work behind the scenes, secretly providing the electricity to power our appliances. The energy crisis has never been so...adorable.

The gist of the game couldn't be simpler—use a gravity gun (think *Half-Life 2*, only for babies) to find the elebits hidden throughout various environments. You view the action from a first-person perspective, aiming the gun by pointing the Wii controller, and holding down the A button to activate the tractor beam. It's remarkably simple: You grab various objects (everything in the level is fair game, even big stuff like refrigerators) and toss them around, causing our li'l electric buddies to scurry for cover. Zap enough of them with your gun before the time limit expires and the level's over.

A few clever twists keep it from being more than just a hotel-room-trashing simulator. First off, many of the environmental objects can be combined to reveal elebits. For example, move slices of bread to the toaster, activate it, and watch the critters fly. Also, you can find power-ups that transform your gun into a rapid-fire, homing laser, briefly transforming the game into a frantic, fast-paced shooter. And although we haven't seen it in action yet, Konami promises a competitive four-player mode that should add an extra layer of depth to the otherwise straightforward proceedings.

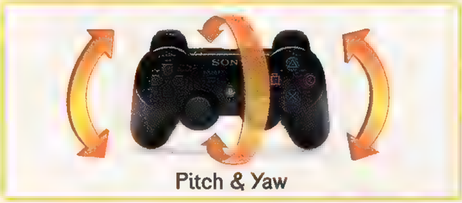


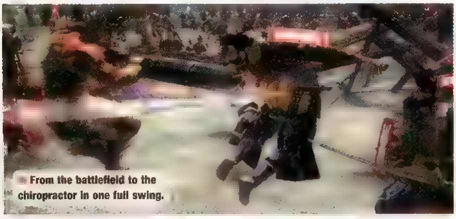
17:24
540
545
727

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

PS3 • Ubisoft • November 2006

This Dubya Dubya Two dogfighter didn't convince many 360 owners to fly through its danger zone, but Ubisoft hopes a few new control alternatives will attract people to its PS3 cockpit. "The control schemes that use the PS3 motion sensor are based on two classic schemes: arcade (up means up, down means down) and simulation (up means down, and vice versa)," says Project Manager Florin Sanda. "In both cases, the player can maneuver the plane just by moving the controller, without making use of the analog sticks."



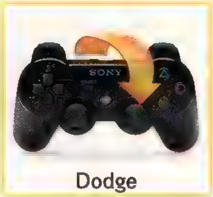


From the battlefield to the chiropractor in one full swing.

GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE

PS3 • Sony CEA • November 2006

As *Onimusha*-esque hack-n-slashers go, last year's *Genji: Dawn Of The Samurai* (PS2) was like a plastic kiddie pool: a bit shallow. Its sequel is shaping up to be more like an Olympic-sized pool, thanks to developer Game Republic smartening up the enemy A.I. and doubling the amount of missions. As for *Days of the Blade*'s control specifics, the tentative plan calls for you use the PS3 motion-sensing function to dodge attacks via pulling back on the joypad.

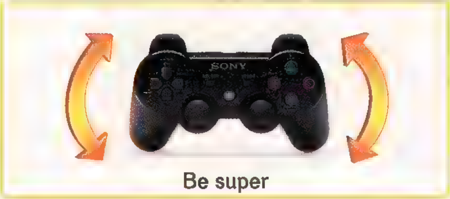


The Thing gets a little too aggressive during Saturday morning's snowball fight.

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

PS3 • Activision • November 2006

Just as with the Wii version of *Ultimate Alliance*, you can expect a pretty good workout with the PS3 edition—moving the controller in various directions accesses special powers. The game also takes advantage of the controller's built-in feature at specific moments. During the Galactus boss fight, for example, shaking it frees you from his grasp, and tilting it guides the Silver Surfer around his massive cosmic girth. ➤

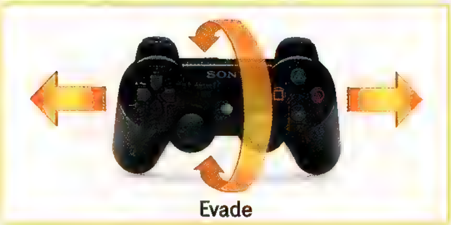


UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM

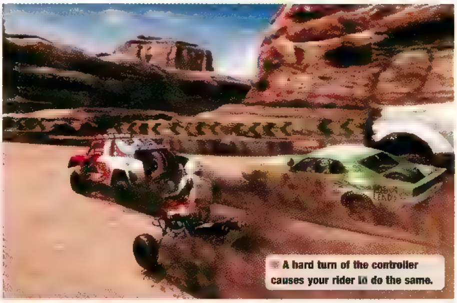
PS3 • Sony Online • November 2006

With the PSP's *Untold Legends* franchise PS3 bound, the developer's looking to get rid of some of the micromanagement that bogs down most action-RPGs while making limited use of the controller's new shake-n-bake support. So instead of collecting scores of weapons and armor (that you inevitably end up hawking) like in past games, you now have set item archetypes you can modify with enhancements. And rather than juggling potions, you pick up life-replenishing orbs.

As for the motion-sensing controller, says Producer Andy Sites: "We actually have a number of ways that we would like to integrate the motion sensitivity into *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom*, such as allowing the player to dodge enemy attacks by tilting the controller left, right, forward, and backward. By offering this as an option, it allows the player to keep their hands on the combat controls, while evading an attack becomes more of a subconscious reaction." Provided the gameplay does enough to keep us awake, the control addition, though simple, is something we can definitely get behind.



Evade



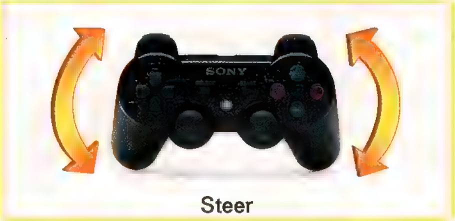
A hard turn of the controller causes your rider to do the same.

MOTORSTORM

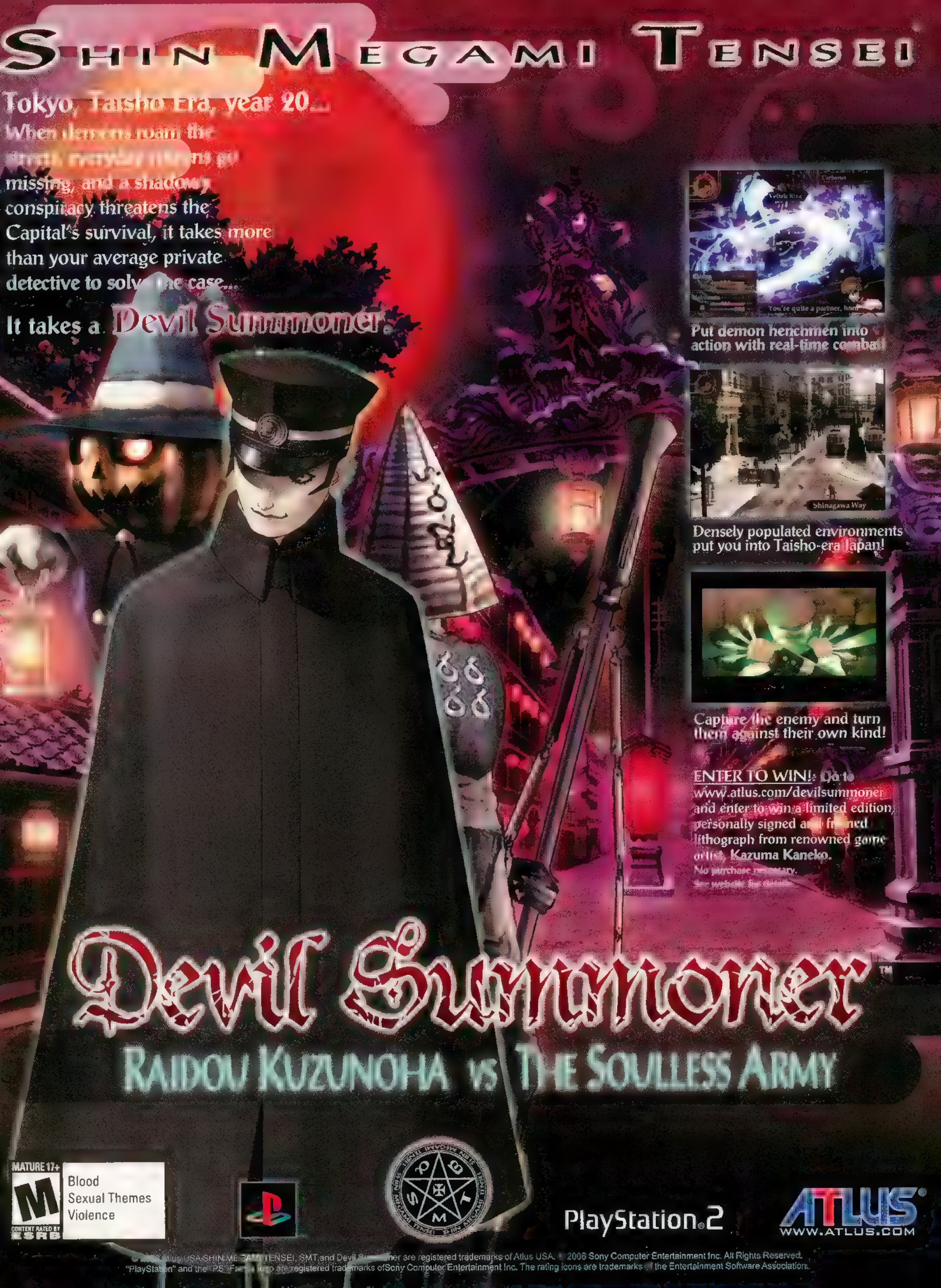
PS3 • Sony CEA • November 2006

Prettier, faster, bigger—these are just some of the words in the "next-gen" dictionary. *MotorStorm* adds one more: vulgar. "Riders and drivers will now flip you the bird when they get cut off," says Producer Nigel Kershaw. "The PlayStation 3 allows us to really breathe life into racing, with riders and drivers that interact with the player and each other. They really feel like they are people rather than shop-window mannequins."

Now, if you don't want A.I. grease monkeys shooting you rude gestures, you better get acclimated to this off-roader's motion-sensing mechanics, which turn the PS3 controller into a glorified steering wheel. Possessing quick reflexes is also essential, as these down and dirty tracks are always changing—even during the race. "You can really take the environments apart in *MotorStorm*," says Kershaw. "There are plenty of things to smash and a deformable landscape to churn up. In gameplay terms, this means that you need to always keep your wits about you, as the gameplay changes from lap to lap. Sure, the route is the same, but the progressive destruction means that each lap is a new challenge." Not to mention, this ever-shifting terrain offers even more opportunities to piss off the competition.



Steer



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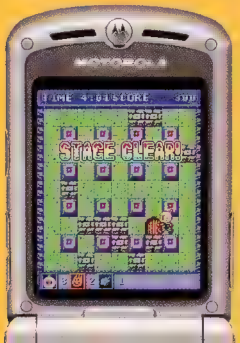
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WAR JOURNAL

I spend a day with **Gears of War,** and my head explodes

by Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Cliff Bleszinski clearly likes being a dick. "Run, bitches, run!" he screams as he gleefully drags a giant orbital laser beam across the map, scorching anything that gets in its way in a multiplayer test session. "It's the energy equivalent of the f***in' *Monty Python* foot stepping on guys," says Bleszinski, lead designer of *Gears of War*, the heavily hyped Xbox 360 shooter that we know you've heard of already. He adds, "I feel like the giant kid from *The Far Side* where I have the magnifying glass, and the one ant turns to the other ant and says, 'Hey, are you getting hot?'" ➤

The heat of developing Microsoft's next killer app doesn't seem to be affecting Bleszinski, but maybe that's because I'm coming at it all wrong. Originally, I thought *Gears*, due out November 12, was meant to be gamers' next "*Halo*"—the must-own game that would have throngs of consumers shaking fists of $100 bills at frazzled store clerks across the country, demanding Xbox 360s before supply runs out and anarchy sets in. But after spending a day at developer Epic Games, I see that *Gears* is less about being the next big thing and more about satisfying Bleszinski's sadistic urges. When he's describing gameplay, he loves using violent metaphors (destructible cover: "...then the sofa you're hiding behind starts to crumble and pop. You pull your enemy out of cover like you're pulling a hermit crab out of its shell."). He tells stories where he's humiliated his foe ("I'll sneak up behind an enemy, and I'll tag him with a smoke grenade. All of a sudden, he's running around the map with smoke coming out of his ass, and everyone's like, 'Ha-ha, look at the idiot.'"). And as you've read already, he's not shy with the swear words. The guy certainly seems more wrapped up in the game's emotional and visceral aspects rather than with any potential sales figures, and after playing the game for a few hours, I can see what his intentions are.

But I'm getting ahead of myself here....

Interview With
THE BULLY

The great red hype

9 a.m.: My cohort Jason Bertrand (who filmed and edited the *1UP Show* portion of this feature) and I arrive at Cary, NC–based Epic at an ungodly, lazy-journalist-unfriendly hour. We sit down in a conference room full of game journalists from Europe and Asia who are here to work on their respective cover stories. Before we were going to see or touch the game, the Epic team wanted to make one thing clear to all of us: Everything is still a work in progress. The game may chug. The game may crash. The game may not look complete. Fine, that comes with the territory. We aren't reviewing the final product, after all, but these disclaimers make me wonder if *Gears* isn't as far along as it needs to be this close to release. I will find out soon enough....

Epic splits us up into smaller groups, and Jason and I learn that we're going to have to wait a bit longer before we can wrap our hands around any controllers—because first up for us is our interview with the kid with the magnifying glass.

Bleszinski meets with us at his desk, which looks more like a shrine dedicated to Optimus Prime than a development station. But the topic of conversation isn't going to be about his passion for the Autobot leader, but rather, the passion surrounding his game, from him all the way to the gamers who haven't even played it yet.

"Have you ever seen a new [intellectual property] hyped like this?" Bleszinski asks me.

"*Halo*, maybe," I reply.

"Yeah, maybe, and that turned out well, right? I dunno...all I know is that the amount of hype right now is ridiculous," he says. "I Googled '*Gears of War*' the other day, and I got like 20 million hits off it. There's a guy who got a tattoo of the little gear and skull logo, and he hasn't even played the game. I'm like, 'What if you don't like it, dude?' I guess it'll still look kinda cool on him...."

What would motivate a gamer to get inked for a game he's never played? What's driving this hype?

Perhaps it's the graphics. I can safely say you won't see a better-looking game this year. The human soldiers have scars, weathered faces, and a thin layer of grime covering their bodies and armor. These guys aren't shiny, heroic warriors of the sci-fi future. They're grumpy, fatigued, war-torn men who look like they'd rather be somewhere else, despite looking tough as all hell. ("They actually express how exhausted they are during all of this," says Bleszinski. "They just want to go home and have a ➤

The story so far

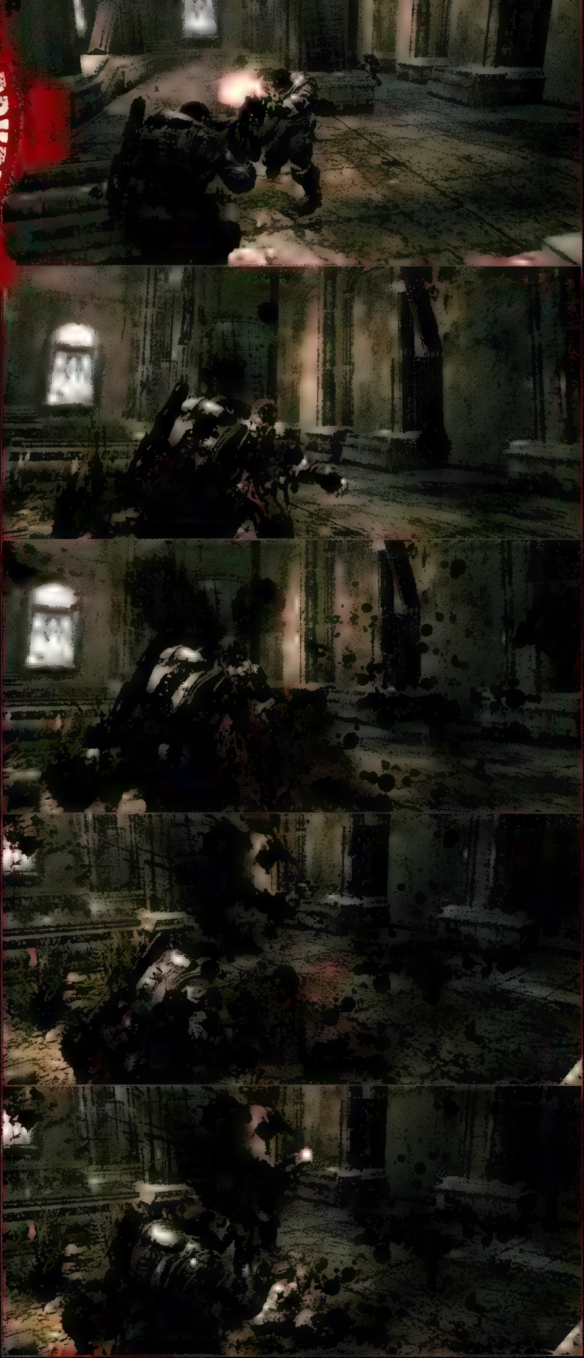
The people on Earth-like planet Sera have been warring among themselves for decades. But on Emergence Day, the Locust Horde crawled out from their hidden, underground lairs in a massive surprise attack that wiped out untold masses of Sera's human population in one day. Unprepared to deal with this new threat, the humans laid waste to most of Sera's surface in a desperate attempt to deprive the Locust of the planet's natural, military, and strategic resources. Now, the people of Sera are united against a new, unfamiliar enemy.

You are Marcus Fenix, an ex–Coalition of Ordered Government soldier jailed for leaving his post to save his papa. Your old COG buddy Dom busts you out of prison, however, so you can help with the fugly Locust threat. *Gears of War* tells the next 36 hours of Fenix's life (storywise, not literal game-playing time)....

The ultra violence

Chain saw

It's not clean, quick, and efficient like *Halo 2*'s plasma sword, but *Gears of War*'s chain saw (mounted at the end of the Lancer assault rifle) still obliterates enemies with one noisy melee attack.



friggin' sandwich, right?") These grunts also move with lifelike weight and momentum. When you slam into a wall for cover, you feel like a 250-pound, all-muscle gorilla of a man whose extra-heavy-duty (and dingy) armor would crush the average nerd who's playing this game. The city environments look just as incredible. Smoking rubble, charred concrete, and oxidized metal accent otherwise beautiful, grand structures that are based on real-life, classic London architecture.

Or maybe it's the gameplay that has people excited. Think action-heavy *Halo* mixed with the hide-and-seek tactical elements from *Ghost Recon*. You won't go running around like Master Chief hopped up on Red Bull, but you don't have to be too afraid of sticking your neck out from behind cover, either. The game's all about big guns, big explosions, and big monsters...but if you're not careful about using cover, you'll be donating big buckets of your own blood to the cause.

Or it could be the pedigree that has gamers pumped. Epic is the team behind the *Unreal* series of shooters, which has done particularly well on the PC side of gaming. These guys know their shooters, and they know how to make a multiplayer experience work.

Nah. It's the graphics. It's so incredibly hard not to be impressed with them—you won't want to touch your original Xbox after seeing this game in motion. "We want to make sure that we pass the 'mom test,'" says Bleszinski. "We want to make sure the visual fidelity is so significant that your mom would be like, 'Wow, Billy. I'll spend $299 on this system for you.'"

But as all hardcore gamers are fond of saying, it can't just be about the graphics. Bleszinski, as hardcore a gamer as he is a game designer, knows this as well as anyone. "What a good shooter does: It has that core, inner loop of getting the little stuff right," he says. "Pull the trigger and the sound is perfect. The muzzle flash looks good coming off the gun. You can tell that you've shot your enemy. The controls don't feel slippery—they don't feel like you're controlling a 400-pound drunk Marine. I think that's something that *Halo* mastered, and it's something that we're trying to master with *Gears*. There are other games where, technically, they don't do anything wrong, but there's that extra little bit, that spirit, that soul, that's just missing." ➤

> **"I think the graphics are so good, people will be willing to adapt to a slightly different style of play."**
>
> —Gears of War *Lead Designer Cliff Bleszinski*

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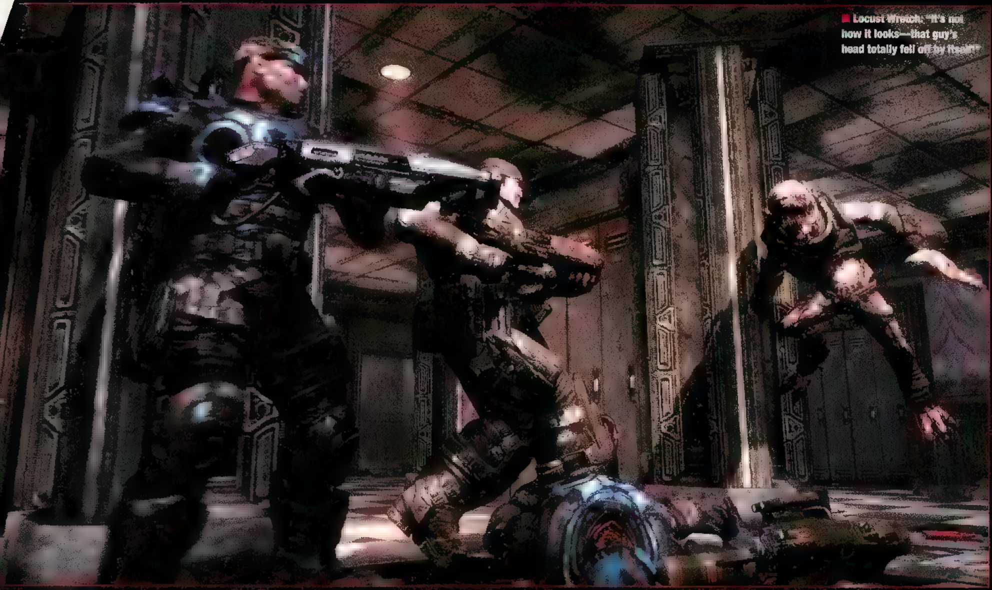


Locust Wretch: "It's not how it looks—that guy's head totally fell off by itself!"

"If you just have great graphics, that's not enough," he continues. "You'll get bored of the game. It's like if a girl's pretty—that's fun for a little while, but eventually you sit there at dinner not talking. You need all of it with relationships, with life, with a game.... So graphics matter. Gameplay matters. Story matters. Control matters. Pacing matters. When you save matters. It's all of it; it's everything."

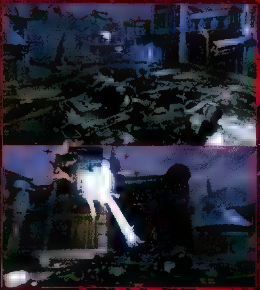
Inspiration points

Taking a look at these screenshots, you might think the game draws inspiration from such classics as *Aliens* or not-so-classics like *Starship Troopers*. It's actually a bit closer to home than that. "[Other games] are always trying to be *Blade Runner*, *Aliens*, or *Evil Dead*, over and over and over again," says Bleszinski. "Our game's more influenced by CNN and Fox News. Running behind this character, it looks like footage from f***in' Baghdad." The developers, however, aren't just sitting around watching Headline News and jotting down notes. One of their animators is a former Army Ranger who got to experience the real-life *Black Hawk Down* in Somalia. "The movie apparently really glossed over how bad it actually was there, as far as guys running at you with their child in their arms, shooting you, assuming that you're not going to shoot back," says Bleszinski. "That whole gloves-are-completely-off element of warfare where people just don't give a s***...speaking to the war camera [like that] is what the game kinda does—just being inundated with war media, filtered and unfiltered."

Of course some movies act as muses for *Gears of War*. We saw a little *Pitch Black* in this game (see sidebar, right). Then you have the execution move that inspired the screenshot on our cover: "If you [hit X when you're over your down-but-not-out opponent]" says Bleszinski, "you essentially do that scene from *American History X*, which is the curb stomp." It doesn't surprise us that the developers borrowed that disturbing moment from the flick. If you've ever seen an angry Edward Norton putting his boot to the back of someone's head while it's resting (teeth first) on a concrete curb, the image never leaves *your* head (and if it has left your head, you can thank us for bringing it back). Now, you'll get to do something similar to your multiplayer opponents to finish them off. Nasty.

Bats out of hell

Besides the Locust, you'll have to deal with the Kryll, vicious batlike creatures that have an unhealthy aversion to light. They eat the weaker Locust warriors, and they're happy to feast on COG soldiers, too. During the day, you won't even see them. At night, watch out. To keep the Kryll off your grill, light 'em up: "[There is this] whole sequence of the game where you're blowing up propane tanks to stay in the light," says Bleszinski. "Or you can light this car on fire, push it down the hill, and run with it to make sure you stay in the light. Because if you step outside of the light, you have a second, you hear a scream, and then they all swarm down and gib you." Part of the game also lets you guide your A.I. or human partner around under the safe glow of a UV spotlight. Keep him lit, and he'll live through this mess. Or shine it directly on the Kryll to crisp them in midair.



This tank (found in the campaign mode only) has enough juice to power the engine or the Kryll-frying UV-ray turret...but not both at the same time.

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A little help?

But hey, lest you think *Gears of War* is too violent and will incur the wrath of politicians, you *can* help people in this game. That's something, right? Right? When your A.I. teammates go down, they don't die right away. Instead, they're in a near-death "bleeding out" phase, helpless but savable. If you go to them and hit X, you can bring them back to active duty. It works the same way in multiplayer: If someone drains your health with anything that's not a sure-death hit (chain saw, sniper head shot, grenade in the lap, etc.), you'll start "bleeding out." Your screen turns red, and you can't move or do anything except jam on the A button to stall death for a bit. If a teammate can get to you before your bleeding-out meter runs dry, he can bring you back to full health. But if your buddy's too late, or you get shot or executed during that phase, then time's up, buddy. Onscreen indicators will point out where help is needed on the battlefield.

Bleszinski describes one watercooler moment in a way that should put all politicians at ease (not really): "I was getting tagged by this guy...one of the level designers. He got me down and was coming over to stomp me, and my buddy came in around the corner like, 'Here comes the cavalry' and knocked him down. My buddy intentionally didn't kill the guy, because he knew he was no longer a threat at that moment. He knew the more important thing was to resurrect me before I bled out. So he resurrected me, but not only that, he was a gentleman and allowed me to go over and stomp the guy who had knocked me down, as this kinda nice revenge. Right then, I literally was like, 'F*** you!' as I stepped on his head. It felt so good."

We talk about many more things that morning, which you can catch on the *1UP Show* (you can find a link to this episode on EGM.1UP.com—look for this issue's "extras"). But it's time to see how the single-player game is.

The Solo Game

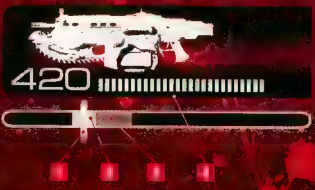
Baby steps

After we finish up with Bleszinski, Jason and I head over to the single-player demo room. The Epic developers who are

"Why are you even playing? Why don't you just go kick a cat or something? Get a life. It's just sad, really."

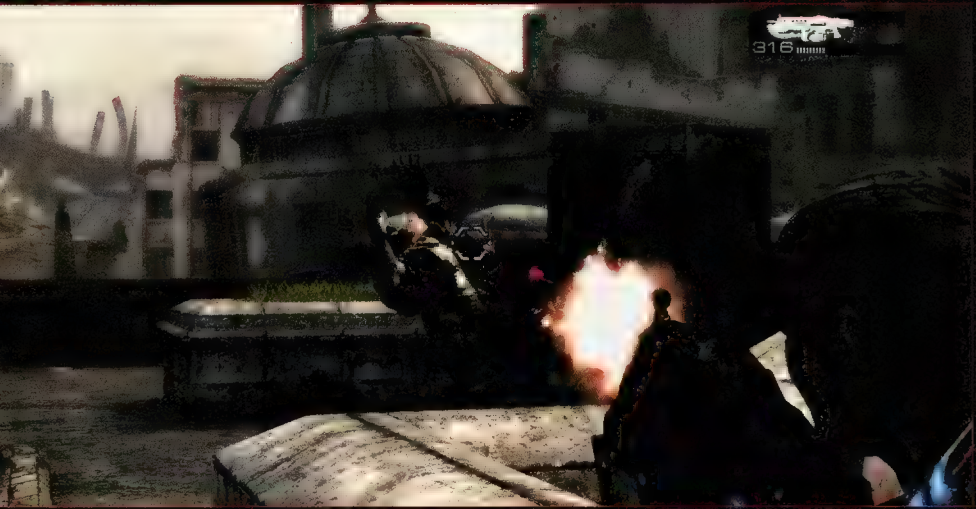
—Bleszinski to online cheaters. Epic will be actively looking for them but Bleszinski acknowledges it will be impossible to fully prevent cheating

Cock 'em



When you need to reload, think golf...as in, golf videogames. Hit the reload button and a bar (1) will start sliding across the Active Reload Meter. Hit the button again when the bar's over the smaller sweet spot (2) and you'll perform a "perfect reload": a faster-than-normal reload plus extra damage (which will be toned down in multiplayer) for all the new bullets you just added to the current clip. If you stop the bar on the larger sweet spot (3), you'll get a faster reload but no damage boost. If you hit the button at any other point on the meter, you'll flub it and your gun will jam for a split second, taking longer to reload. Or, just ignore this stuff altogether and go for the normal reload by hitting the button only once. If you nail "perfect reload," your juiced-up bullets will glow in the ammo counter above (4).

Everything's cover in *Gears of War*: walls, pillars...even couches, which disintegrate under fire.



babysitting us tell us two things: 1) They recommend we pick the "casual" difficulty setting instead of "hardcore" (these names are subject to change, by the way), because 2) We're only going to have one crack at playing through the demo. If we die, we're done playing single-player for the day. I'm not sure why they're being so strict with us, since it's in their best interest to let us have, you know, *fun* while we're there, but I take it as a challenge. I select "hardcore" and roll my eyes at Jason when I see him picking "casual."

The game begins with my old military partner springing me out of an otherwise abandoned prison (see The Story So Far sidebar). The tutorial shows me how to use the A button for every cover or evasive move in the game, like hiding behind pillars, ducking and running (known as the "roadie run," like you see roadies do during a music concert), "SWAT turning" across open doorways, or rolling to safety. Then it shows me how to use the Y button to automatically track things of interest, from your closest teammate (by default), to something my A.I. partner wants me to do (pick up that key, open that door), to an event happening at that moment (like that door a team of Locust Drones is blowtorching through to get to us).

When the Drones finally bust through, they immediately split up to avoid clumping together and head for fallen stone columns for cover. While eyeing these guys, I notice that when I equip grenades, the game draws out a flight path for them on my screen, including any bounces and ricochets, so I try testing a few out. I also practice some blind firing, which lets me shoot in the general direction of the enemy without exposing my body. But that's a bit too inaccurate for me (and a seemingly waste of ammo, though I discover later that the game gives you plenty of that), so I pop my head out and put my enemies in my sights. A few clips and fountains of Locust blood later, my partner and I escape the prison into open air.

We join up with more soldiers to look for a missing unit (only to find out later on that they're all dead). As we make our way through the city streets and a museum-like building, we fight more Drones that are popping out of Emergence Holes that connect to their underground lairs. If I hadn't wasted so many grenades earlier, I could've sealed up some of these gateways. At least these holes don't infinitely spawn Locust, or I'd have to roll my eyes at the developers, too....

Several more Emergence Holes and Drones later, the ➤

Shoot 'em if you want to keep 'em: Most characters or enemies you run into in the campaign mode become selectable models you can use in multiplayer.

demo comes to an end. I really didn't notice the problems the developers were paranoid about. The game runs fairly smoothly for the most part (Epic promises it'll be even better by the time *Gears* ships). The graphics are just like what you see on these pages (meaning: awesome). Nothing really looks broken or incomplete. Looks like the game, at least the first couple of single-player levels, is practically ready to go.

Multiplayer

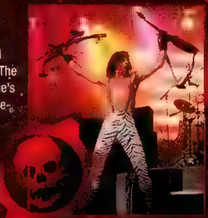
Finish him

Epic's shuffling us over to the multiplayer demos, and I know my one chance this day to chant "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!" to these foreign journalists is fast approaching.

The only mode we were going to play today is War Zone: a 4-on-4 elimination match where everyone gets one life. If you die, it's off to the dead channel (where you can chat with other casualties) to watch your teammates finish up. Two other modes include Assassination (your team wins by killing the other team's designated leader) and Execution (you have to perform a close-up execution—curb stomp, chain saw, or point-blank pistol bullet to the head—to finish your opponent, or else he'll come back into play). These are the three main multiplayer types (besides two-player co-op over Xbox Live), as Bleszinski has no interest in having people play his game the old-fashioned way. "No capture the flag...and I don't really want the game to devolve into a deathmatch," he says. "If you have no fear of death, then you just run at each other, and it devolves into a *Quake* match. That's cool, but we're not that game."

The first level we play is Mansion, which looks ridiculous... and I mean that in a good way. We start off outdoors, on the mansion's grounds. Rain is falling from the darkened sky; moonlight casts an eerie glow over the hedges and fountains.... It's a scene straight out of a big-budget haunted-house flick, but I feel like I'm actually *there.* I go inside the dilapidated house and see old rugs, rotted furniture, peeling wallpaper, and rainwater spilling in through wide-open gaps in the roof.... Although my eyes are busy scanning for our foes, what I catch in my peripheral vision is still blowing my mind. Yes, Billy...Mom will be impressed. She will be *really* impressed. ➤

Achieve this!



"On behalf of Ted Nugent, I authorize Microsoft to incorporate the expression 'The Nuge' into its *Gears of War* game." So reads a legal letter from the rocker/hunter/gun nut's lawyer to the *Gears* team. "The Nuge" is one of the game's many Xbox 360 achievements—this one's for killing enough people with the Torque Bow (which fires explosive-tipped arrows—think *Rambo II*). Others include "Cluster Luck" (simultaneous grenade kills) and "Is It a Spider?" (tagging someone with a grenade...in reference to a joke on *Halo* machinima series *Red vs. Blue*). Getting 100,000 online kills will land you an achievement as well, and any you earn while playing the campaign mode cooperatively with a friend will still count toward your single-player goals.

Going through the campaign mode, you may see *Gears of War*'s iconic skull-and-gear Crimson Omen logos. "Have you ever been driving on the freeway," asks Bleszinski, "and you see a little cross or flowers that somebody put up on the side of the road where they lost someone? The Crimson Omen is kind of like that. People spraypaint the Crimson Omen wherever a soldier fell. That's your cue that somewhere around there are COG tags, which, of course, are the dog tags of the COG, no pun intended...well, pun very intended." If you find enough COG tags in each area, you'll pick up achievements, natch.

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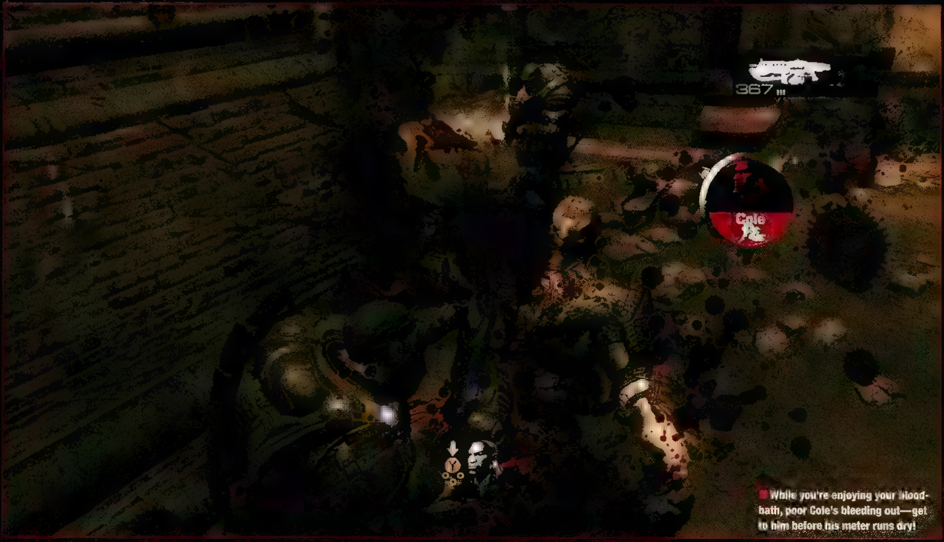

While you're enjoying your blood-bath, poor Cole's bleeding out—get to him before his meter runs dry!

> **"I don't want to be going around war zones looking for chicken pot pies, you know?"**
>
> *—Bleszinski explains why* Gears of War *won't have health pickups. You just have to avoid bullets and rest to regain health, similar to* Halo 2

➤ "Let's stick together so we can cover each other's backs," I say to Jason as we start the War Zone match. He agrees to this in principle, but our team strategy lasts for about 10 seconds as we wander off in separate directions. It's a little bit getting used to the gameplay, a little bit learning the level, but we aren't quite ready to work as a team just yet. "Who needs him?" I think to myself as I pick up the Boom Shot, a two-shot rocket launcher/grenade launcher hybrid that ends up putting me on a killing streak that continues for several rounds...until the other team wises up and goes after the same gun on the map. Since the level's symmetrical and fairly small, our matches are now all starting off with a sprint to get the Boom Shot first. The stand-offs are intense as we use smoke grenades, cover, blind firing, and balls-out running to get into better positions for the pickup, but after a few rounds, I was wishing our opening moves didn't feel so rehearsed. Sure, I could go off-script and do something different when the round starts, but I just couldn't stand the thought of the other team getting that power weapon first. So off I go again and again after the Boom Shot....

Finally, we get to my head exploding

When the fights don't start and end with the Boom Shot, we're going at it with assault rifles and their attached chain saws (unfortunately, the Hammer of Dawn orbital laser described at the start of this article isn't something we'd get to play with today). But the most memorable moment for me is when I charge at a ➤

032
Baird
Cole

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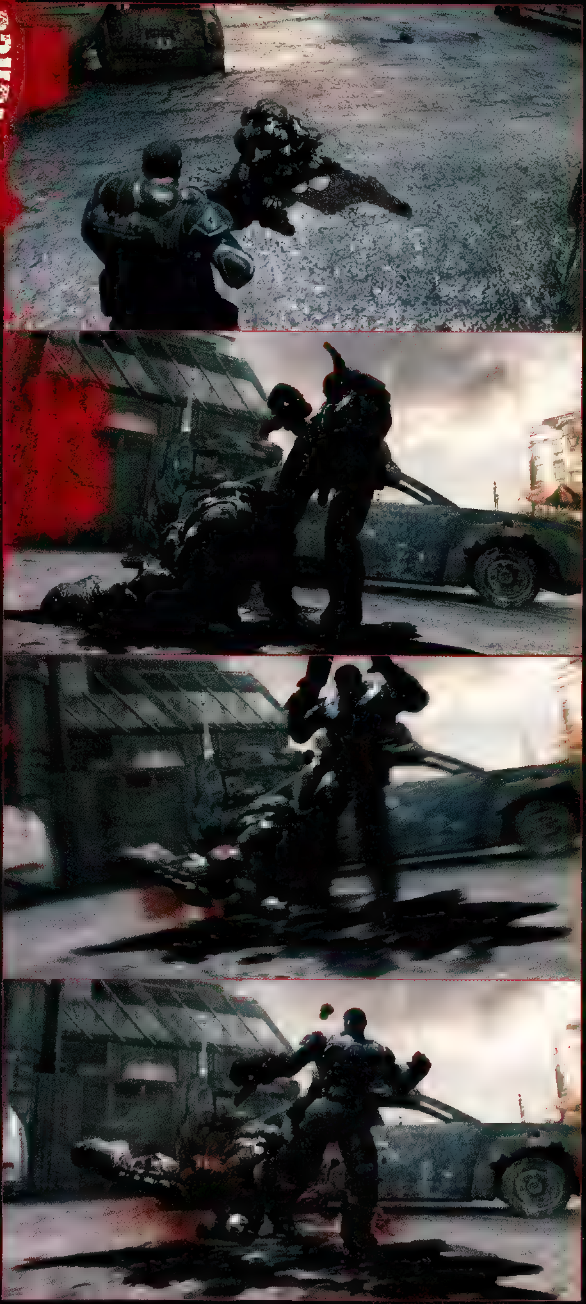
The ultra violence

Curb stomp

Sate your inner psychopath and stomp on a downed foe's head to finish him off. Close-up executions like this yield extra points in multiplayer. It also makes four out of five nerds go "aw, hell yeah!"



guy with my chain saw all revved up, thinking he will probably miss me at that close range with his equipped sniper rifle. As I get to within gut-tearing range, my head explodes in a geyser of thick red life juice. I'm wrong: He head shot me at point blank with that very sniper rifle—the developers who are around us watching the match all erupt in a simultaneous "ohhh!" Now I understand an integral part of the game's design, remembering back to something Bleszinski said earlier that day: "Because you see your head pop and explode in third-person in intimate detail, you're like, 'Aw, you got me, but look at how my f***in' head just exploded in front of me. That was kinda cool.' You don't feel as bad." I had to smile because he's right. It *is* an impressive and glorious kill. There would be no "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!" today....

At the end of each battle, we're ranked by how many points we earn, not by the number of body bags we need. You do get points for each kill, but you also get scored for executions, reviving teammates, melee hits, chain saw kills, head shots with the sniper rifle, doing any type of damage, or grenade-tagging someone...something I couldn't manage to pull off in live battle, but which sounds plenty fun. "I've been playing where I'm holding the frag grenade," says Bleszinski, living up to the "bully" label we've slapped on him, "and I'm able to hit 'melee' on someone and it does this 'thuunk!' sound. I fade away and the guy pops and it's incredibly gratifying. But being able to do it to somebody who's helpless is incredibly enjoyable. We'll all crowd around with smoke grenades and stick 'em on a guy who's down but not out on the other team. He's smoking, and he's like, 'You guys are dicks—you can kill me now.' You don't get extra points for that one, but you do get extra points for the frag grenades. But basically, we have this system that rewards players who play with each other as well as players who finish off the enemy with panache."

Trading places

Epic asks us if we want to switch up sides for the next map, Train Station. I quickly volunteer to join a different group because Jason hasn't been much help, contributing exactly zero kills to our team during the entire Mansion run.

We find out each of the eight multiplayer maps has a certain theme to it (Mansion: destructible cover with the ratty old couches; Gas Station: explosive sections of the level; and so on). Train Station's gimmick is a speedy locomotive that barrels down the middle of the stage every minute or so, killing ➤

"It's not the deepest multiplayer, but it has fast tactics. It's tactical, but for people like me that have ADD."

—Bleszinski sums up Gears of War*'s gameplay style*

5 Reasons why Gears of War WILL be your next "Halo"

Can Epic's latest replace the current king of shooters?

1 The graphics
One word (repeated many times): sick, sick, sick, sick.... Wherever this game pops up, it's gonna draw big, wide-eyed crowds.

2 Points system
Gears isn't just about shooting people; it's about shooting people then finishing them off with brutal style. Oh...there's something about earning points for saving people, too, but...yeah—brutal style.

3 Co-op
It's not just that you can play two-player co-op over Xbox Live, system link, and splitscreen.... Whereas most shooters artificially inject a second protagonist into the existing single-player framework and story line when player two jacks in, *Gears* is co-op from the start, whether that second guy is A.I.- or human-controlled. Flanking, splitting up, working together...it's all part of the game plan.

4 Halo 2 cheaters
It'll be nice to get away from them for a while, won't it? At least until people start figuring out how to cheat in *Gears of War*...

5 Better sniping
This may seem like an odd one, but think about it. Sniping is one of the genre's small pleasures, right? It feels good to cap someone from far, far away. In *Gears of War*, everything's more visceral (not to sound too psychotic, but it feels better to make a head *explode* from far, far away). Not only that, but because this isn't a run-and-gun game, sniping becomes more accessible to more players because targets don't move around as much.

5 Reasons why Gears of War WON'T be your next "Halo"

Why the king will remain the king

1 Taking cover
You *need* to take advantage of cover in *Gears of War*. Because of that alone, it won't be as mass-market friendly as less-restrictive games like *Halo 2*.

3 Eight-player limit
Multiplayer works well with eight players in two teams of four, but that limit will turn off shooter fans used to big-party gaming. *Halo 2* supports 16 players in whatever configuration you want: 16-player free-for-all, eight teams of two, 15-on-1, and so on.

5 Modes
Part of *Halo 2*'s longevity comes from its numerous multiplayer modes, all fully customizable. *Gears* only has three primary modes designed around the two-team system, and you won't find traditional deathmatches and capture the flags here.

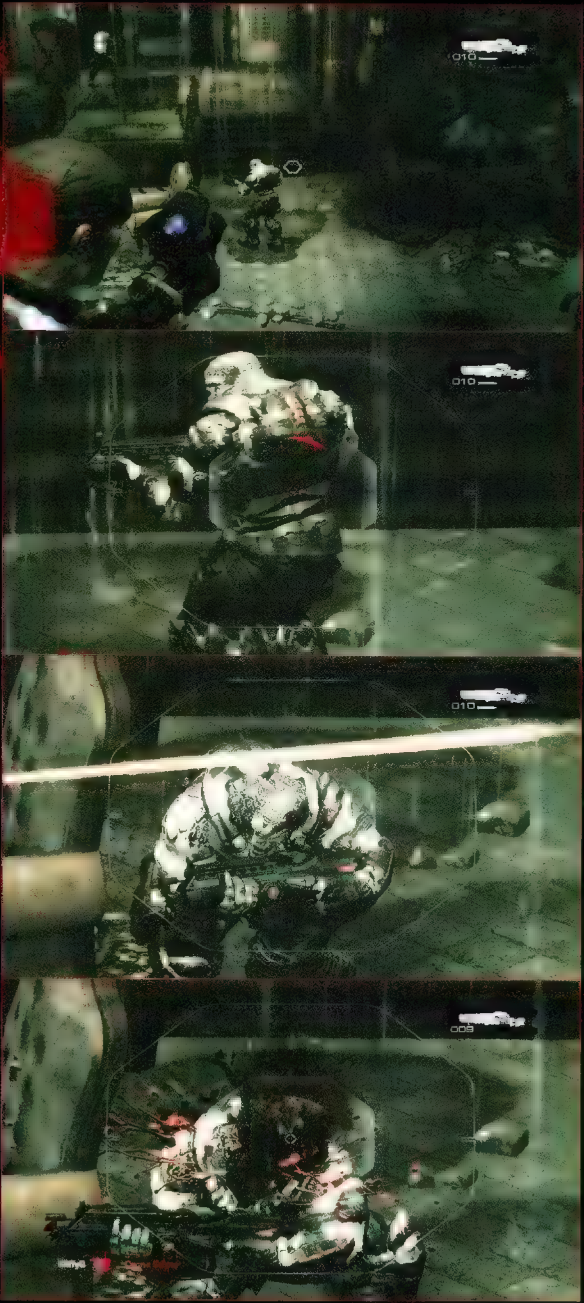
2 Violence
Gears may very well be the bloodiest game ever made, making it something a lot of youngsters can't (and shouldn't) play, limiting its market reach.

4 Limited maps
Gears will ship with eight multiplayer maps, putting it on the conservative side of the shooter spectrum (*Halo 2* comes with 12)...though this seems to be the new trend on the Xbox 360 (so companies can charge you separately for downloads—no word yet on *Gears*' downloadable-content plans). Also, because Epic's designing multiplayer for two-team play, the maps are smaller and more symmetrical, leaving less room for creative, free-form designs.

The ultra violence

Sniper

You might not think *Gears of War*'s small, designed-for-eight multiplayer levels make for good sniper battles, but as you can see from this extra-bloody screenshot sequence...they can. The game's more methodical pace (slower = easier to hit) and beefier character models (bigger dudes = bigger targets) give you plenty of opportunities to put large-caliber holes in people.



everything in its path. On this level, the Boom Shot is right on the tracks, where I'm either a sitting duck to the other team or a splat waiting to happen on the train's grill. After a few hard-learned lessons, I choose not to go after the Boom Shot so much this time around.

Train Station doesn't visually wow me like Mansion did, but its tight, symmetrical design forces lots of close-up action. Something about this stage clicks for Jason, too. Now that he's on the opposing team, I see him racking up the kills, even leading his crew on several occasions.

Like with the single-player demo, I can't find much to complain about here (other than Jason deciding he can shoot all of a sudden when I'm not on his team). No crashes, no problems... and I don't mind the smaller player limit, because I really enjoy the new choices I have to deal with. Can I save my teammate in time? Should I risk going for the curb stomp for more points? Or should I just shoot him dead from behind the safety of my cover? These decisions—call it *Gears of War*'s multiplayer soul, if you will—keep things dynamic, rewarding, and fun. It may be tough to go back to standard ol' deathmatch after this.

I still need some time to get used to this taking-cover business, though. Maybe I'm too cocky, but I found myself charging into multiplayer battles way too aggressively—and paying for it with my lives. Who can blame me? The characters are beefy. The guns are big. The carnage is plentiful. *Gears of War* looks and feels like a steroid-charged, go-get-'em shooter, not a sissy-boy "hide or I may get shot!" Tom Nancy affair (no offense to Mr. Nancy)....

Closing Time

Our day at Epic is wrapping up, and I find myself slightly disappointed—not because *Gears of War* doesn't deliver on the hype, but because, from what I've played so far, it absolutely does. I don't want to leave here just yet. That time I need to get used to taking cover...can't I work on that now? Like, today, while I'm still here? Can't I work on getting my Boom Shot route times down? Can't I just stand around, ogling the Mansion's graphics for a little longer? Alas, no. Bleszinski politely escorts all of us out the front door and waves goodbye. But as I walk across the parking lot, I look back and notice him smiling at us. Wait, is that a smirk? "Oh, he knows what he's doing," I slowly realize. Today, he teased us with a brief, tantalizing taste of *Gears of War*—and then he cut us off, leaving us hanging and wanting more. Now, we're *Gear*-less until November....

What a dick.

009
009
009
009

Gearing up on 1UP!

Go to **EGM.1UP.com** and look for the "extras" content for this issue. There, you'll find links to ***The 1UP Show*** (we interview Lead Designer Cliff Bleszinski and take a tour of Epic's offices), Bleszinski's **1UP blog**, the **EGM Live* podcast** (we put Bleszinski on the hot seat), and our **Gears of War Contest**, where you can win a limited-edition copy of the game, a *Gears* poster signed by the Epic team, and the E3 limited-edition *Gears of War* faceplate that you can't buy in stores!

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review crew

here come the judges

THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS...

Not so surprising: The first traditional *Final Fantasy* game since 2001 scores Game of the Month honors. More interesting is the realization that this could be one of the last games from the current gen to be honored thusly. With the PlayStation 3 and Wii launching and development gearing up for these systems and the 360, the next-gen moniker is rapidly becoming obsolete. And, aside from choice games like *Guitar Hero II* and *God of War II*, the reasons for going back are getting thin. Seems weird that our PS2s, Cubes, and Xboxes will soon be dead weight, but the march to wave-responding controllers ain't slowing.

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

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GAME OF THE MONTH

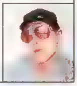
FINAL FANTASY XII

THE REVIEW CREW

Screw the names...where are the scores?

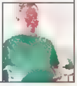
DAN "SHOE" HSU • Editor-in-Chief
It's that time of year: More work. Longer deadlines. Less sleep and exercise. Shoe's new nickname? Plumpkin.
Now Playing: *Gears of War, Dead Rising*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com

SHANE BETTENHAUSEN • Exec. Editor
Final Fantasy XII was the 18th RPG Shane's reviewed this year. Next stop: selling turkey legs at the RenFest.
Now Playing: *FFXII, Castlevania: POR*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



JENNIFER TSAO • Managing Editor
Jen released her own next-gen hardware this month, but, in true industry tradition, launch date and all other details were unavailable as of press time.
Now Playing: House
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com

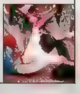
CRISPIN BOYER • Senior Editor
Inspired by Jennifer's plot to vacation during the system launches, Crispin decided to take some "maternity leave," too.
Now Playing: *Just Cause* (Why? Just 'cause.)
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



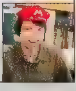
BRYAN INTIHAR • Previews Editor
Man, it was a rough deadline for Bry. Just look at him: When the goin' got tough, this big boy would curl up in the fetal position. P***y.
Now Playing: *FFXII*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com

GREG FORD • Reviews Editor
Might Bry's hellish deadline be Ford's fault? He spent hours dreaming of next-gen games instead of writing previews.
Now Playing: *Dead Rising, Guitar Hero*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com

MICHAEL DONAHOE • News/Features Ed.
Michael likes *Dead Rising*...but getting eaten by *real* zombies? Not so much.
Now Playing: *Dead Rising, The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap*
Blog: egmiked.1UP.com

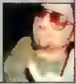


MARK MACDONALD • Editor-at-Large
Launch shortages? Mark cares not for these things. He's been in line for his PS3 since August... 2004.
Now Playing: *FFXII, Phantasy Star Universe*
Blog: mark.1UP.com

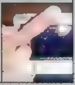


ROBERT ASHLEY • Staff Reviewer
Thanks to *Scarface*, Robert now has a continuous loop of famous Tony Montana lines playing in his head.
Now Playing: *Lego Star Wars II: Original Trilogy*
Blog: robertashley.1UP.com

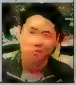
SHIVAM BHATT • Staff Reviewer
Shivam recently discovered that *LocoRoco* plus highly turbulent travel is the fastest path to motion sickness.
Now Playing: *Every Extend Extra, LocoRoco*
Blog: talinthas.1UP.com



JON DUDLAK • Staff Reviewer
Everyone said *Geometry Wars* is easier on a small screen, so Jon bought a 3-inch screen. Turns out everyone's an idiot.
Now Playing: *Geo Wars*
Blog: Soon. Maybe.



JIMMY LEE • Staff Reviewer
Jimmy's back in the crew. After getting sick of his social life, he got back to what truly matters: videogames.
Now Playing: *The Guy Game*, with loneliness
Blog: egmwiley.1UP.com



DEMIAN LINN • Staff Reviewer
It was the best of times (*Test Drive*), it was the worst of times (*The Fast and the Furious*), it was a pretty OK time (*Scarface*).
Now Playing: *Test Drive Unlimited*
Blog: egmdemian.1UP.com

PATRICK MAURO • Staff Reviewer
He's already got the hair, but this syndicated satellite radio guy ponders growing the Adam Morrison 'stache after reviewing *NBA 2K7*.
Now Playing: *NBA 2K7*
Blog: Uh...no

GREG SEWART • Short-Termer
Greg bids a fond farewell to the pages of *EGM* this month so he can go work for the competition. Traitor!
Now Playing: *Oblivion, Dead Rising, NASCAR 07*
Blog: stewy.1UP.com

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■ When 1UP's writers aren't plugging holes in our reviews, they're covering even more games online. You try stopping them.

THE RATING SYSTEM & AWARDS

10-7 GOOD

6.5-5 FAIR

4.5-0 BAD

Platinum
Straight 10s. For games that are life-changing.

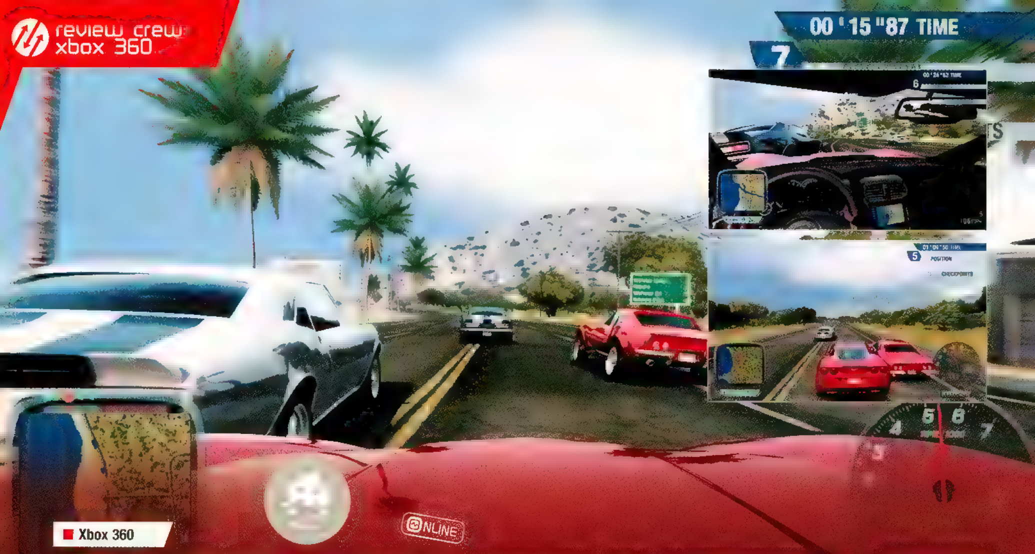
Gold
For games with an average score of 9.0 or higher.

Silver
For games with a mean score of 8.0 or higher.

GAME OF THE MONTH
The highest-scoring game with unanimously "good" scores.

SHAME OF THE MONTH
The lowest-rated game with unanimously "bad" scores.

ESRB Ratings The ESRB's game ratings range from "Everyone" to "Adults Only." Visit **www.esrb.org** for the full lowdown.



Xbox 360

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

Wish you were here

DEMIAN: From the opening moments of *Test Drive Unlimited*, when you choose your character from a lineup of model-types waiting to board a one-way flight to Oahu, it's clear this isn't the usual tune-and-tweak exoticar orgy. *Test Drive* is also like a ($40!) vacation on a disc. Sure, you'll shop for cars and upgrades in between lucrative trips to the races, but you'll also shop for new houses and (hellooo, product placement) clothes for your suave/sultry avatar.

But maybe you don't want *The Sims* in your driving game peanut butter. Don't worry, it's not the hot pants that make this game special. *Test Drive* gives you the entire island of Oahu to explore and tear ass around, but you're not alone in a beautifully dead world—this is a console-first massively multiplayer online *car game* (racing events max out at eight players, though). The roads are filled with fellow playboys and girls, ready to race or just go for a casual Sunday drive...or call you the n-word, but then that's Xbox Live for you.

User-created races, clanlike car clubs (which didn't actually work out of the box, see sidebar), and multiplayer will keep you coming back, but it's the island that grabs you. The game demands you explore its highways and less-traveled byways not only to access new events and car dealerships, but also because driving around the world is just *fun*. It'd be more fun still if the handling were either grimly realistic or *Burnout*-arcadey instead of an unsatisfying hybrid of the two, but that major complaint recedes into the distance when you gun it down the Kamehameha Highway as the evening clouds roll in.

GREG S: I'm pretty stoked that *Test Drive* delivered on the great mix of off- and online, single- and multiplayer driving action Atari tantalizingly promised last year.

Of course, I have some complaints. The handling isn't what it should be: The cars tend to turn on a central axis rather than feel like all four wheels are contacting the ground. Also, the graphics could be better. But when you've got such a massive area to explore and the ability to jump into events so seamlessly, it's hard to fault the presentation too much. I also love that the user-created race system rewards players who make challenges that are tough but still winnable. In fact, everything about the way the gamer interacts with the world and other drivers is designed to promote competition and fairness.

GARNETT: As I weave through traffic on a crowded Hawaiian highway at over 140 mph, the roar of my Maserati GranSport in the surround speakers keeps me alert. Moments later, I hear two guys in my headset wondering what top speed they can hit, quickly followed by two Ferraris blowing by at close to 200. Damn, I love this. Complete with its stunning recreation of Oahu, *Test Drive* lets you live the fantasy of driving the tires off of exotic cars better than any prior attempt. Yes, it's too bad the controls don't keep the dream going. The more proper racing events, such as the many time-based challenges in single player, expose the weaknesses handling a model designed to feel good enough to believe, but by no means to be a simulation. A shame, because I was almost fooled.

Trouble in Paradise

Like the Xbox Live–intensive *Chromehounds*, *Test Drive* had its share of online teething troubles. World server crashes, the odd corrupted save bug, and a botched car club invite system were still causing problems a week after the game hit retail. "During recent peak hours the demand on the servers reached unforeseen levels," says Andrea Schneider, Atari's PR director. "We are working on increasing the server limit, as well as fixing [these] issues with an update." A patch should be available by the time you read this.

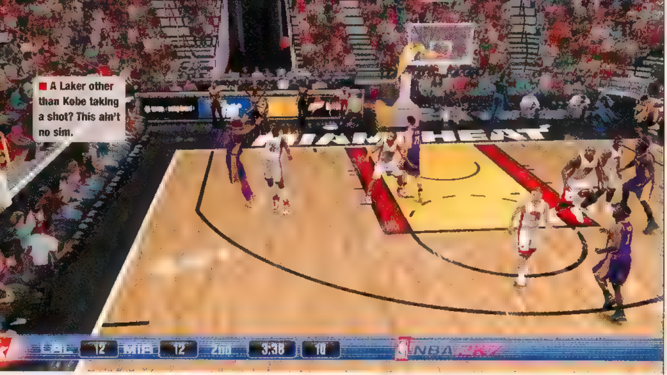
Good: Wait, new ideas in a driving game?
Bad: If only the handling were as beautiful as the scenery
Make Quick Cash: Do the delivery missions—perfectly

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

DEMIAN	GREG S.	GARNETT
8.5	8.5	8.0

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Eden
Players: 1 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.testdriveunlimited.com



A Laker other than Kobe taking a shot? This ain't no sim.

Xbox 360

NBA 2K7

ONLINE

SILVER

Kinda like the Cavs—it's gettin' there

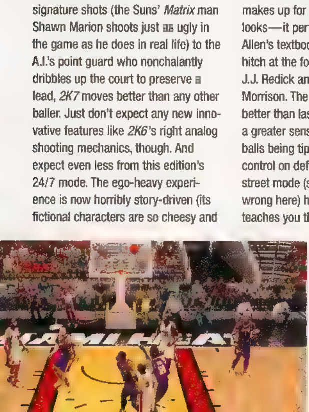
Good: Looks *way* better than *2K6*
Bad: No huge innovations to gameplay
Annoying: The bounty of in-game ads

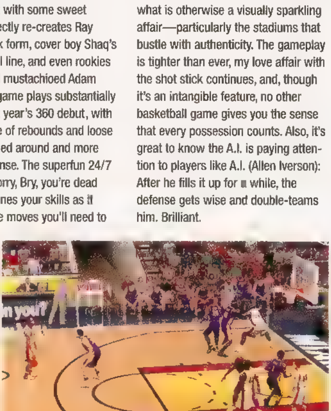
BRYAN: I bagged pretty hard on *NBA 2K*'s 360 debut last year. "Nothing about this one screams—or even whispers—'next gen,'" I said. But I can't be so cruel this time around.

Besides a few questionable player faces (the developers nipped when they should've tucked on some guys like Mavs sharpshooter Dirk Nowitzki), *2K7*'s visuals finally match the series' superior gameplay. It's more than just how they look, too; from the all-new signature shots (the Suns' *Matrix* man Shawn Marion shoots just as ugly in the game as he does in real life) to the A.I.'s point guard who nonchalantly dribbles up the court to preserve a lead, *2K7* moves better than any other baller. Just don't expect any new innovative features like *2K6*'s right analog shooting mechanics, though. And expect even less from this edition's 24/7 mode. The ego-heavy experience is now horribly story-driven (its fictional characters are so cheesy and clichéd), plus you can't control any player other than your created hoopster during team challenges, which leads to unnecessary turnovers and all-around messy play. Bah!

PATRICK M: You know, Gatorade and Toyota should offer gamers some sort of rebate for making them endure their logos that continually pop up during *2K7*. But even though the constant in-game advertising grates, this one makes up for it with some sweet looks—it perfectly re-creates Ray Allen's textbook form, cover boy Shaq's hitch at the foul line, and even rookies J.J. Redick and mustachioed Adam Morrison. The game plays substantially better than last year's 360 debut, with a greater sense of rebounds and loose balls being tipped around and more control on defense. The superfun 24/7 street mode (sorry, Bry, you're dead wrong here) hones your skills as it teaches you the moves you'll need to compete at the NBA level. The multiplayer franchise mode, smart A.I., and progressive in-season fatigue make *2K7* a must-have hoops game.

1UP.COM—TODD: With *NBA 2K7* you'll encounter a handful of players in need of Rip Hamilton plastic masks, as they look to be suffering from either severe facial blistering or outright deformity. These rare irregularities are the lone double dribble in what is otherwise a visually sparkling affair—particularly the stadiums that bustle with authenticity. The gameplay is tighter than ever, my love affair with the shot stick continues, and, though it's an intangible feature, no other basketball game gives you the sense that every possession counts. Also, it's great to know the A.I. is paying attention to players like A.I. (Allen Iverson): After he fills it up for a while, the defense gets wise and double-teams him. Brilliant.

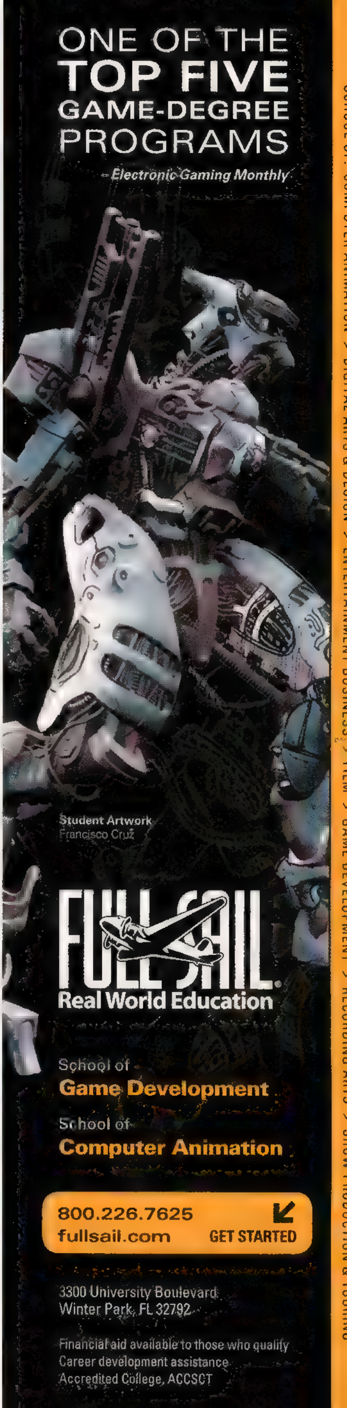




THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	BRYAN	PATRICK M	TODD
	7.5	8.5	8.0

Publisher: 2K Sports
Developer: 2K Sports
Players: 1-4 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.2ksports.com



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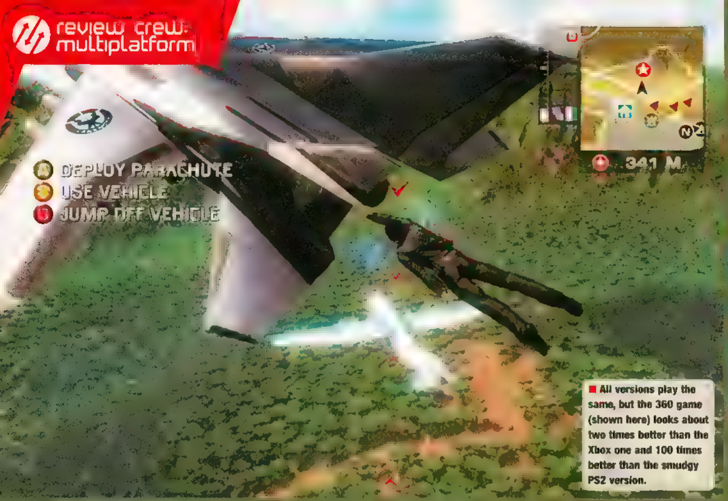

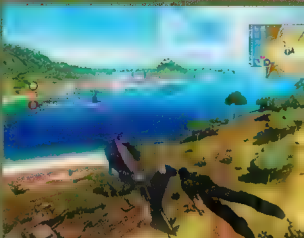

All versions play the same, but the 360 game (shown here) looks about two times better than the Xbox one and 100 times better than the smudgy PS2 version.

XB360/PS2/XB

JUST CAUSE

Puts the "Geronimo!" in Grand Theft Auto

CRISPIN: If any game's going to incite real-life copycat antics, I hope it's *Just Cause*. Because wow!—how cool would it be to read the obituary of some bozo who leapt out of a zooming sports car, paraglided over a cliff, grappled onto a passing helicopter, then tried to hop through its rotor blades into the cockpit? It's all in a minute's work in this game, a spectacularly unrealistic collision of *Grand Theft Auto*'s swipe-anything-that-moves sensibilities and *Mercenaries*' revolutionary warfare.

Your key to this salsa-flavored island kingdom is the grappling hook, which—when combined with your reusable parachute—lets you leap willy-nilly from cars to jets to boats. It's ludicrous-physics-is-for-sissies fun that complements the game's over-the-top explosions (stuff blows up big here). But even with all that free-falling tomfoolery, the missions fall flat on their face. Most involve straightforward variations of "steal this thingie" and "shoot this guy" as you progress through the story, wreaking unrest in a corrupt country. Side missions—which have you boosting guerrilla forces—are even less interesting (but you'll want to trudge through them anyway just to unlock cooler weapons and vehicles).

But things do occasionally fall together nicely in that "emergent gameplay" kind of way. When one mission charged me with destroying an enemy helicopter, I simply holstered my guns, used my grappler to swipe the chopper in midair, then flew it into a mountain seconds after parachuting to safety. Now try that one at home, copycat bozos.

G. FORD: *Just Cause* bugs me 'cause it's a game I know I should enjoy more than I did. It gets big kudos for letting me live out that dream I never knew I had: being a regular Evel Knievel in a *GTA*-style open world (in this case, a lush, jungle-heavy archipelago). The results deliver on the promised thrills—as Crispin so aptly described—but rarely is getting to that point so smooth. The finicky grappling-hook controls lack the intuitive ease you'd like from such an integral control element (never mind the fact that you can't hook onto buildings or trees...wha—?). Even by the game's end, I'd still stumble when trying to sling from car to passing helo. And besides the fun storm-the-government-barricades liberation missions, the bland side missions do nothing to offset the ho-hum main story line.

1UP.COM—SHARKEY: Seems like developers are quite keen on pushing that fine line between a rip-off and an acceptable contribution to the genre this year (see *Saints Row*, *Scarface*, et al). At least *Just Cause* mixes things up a bit. Sure, you're still stealing cars and capping cops, but this time it's to aid guerrillas in toppling the oppressive regime of some piss-hole Caribbean island nation. Like these other guys, I love using the physically improbable parachute and grapple gun for midair helicopter jacking or swinging around like a bizarro Spider-Man (grabbing objects below me). Despite the quirks, *Just Cause* may not be a whole new animal, but it has enough novelty to keep me from blowing it off as *Grand Theft Auto Jr.*

We Ask the Gamemaker Why's It Gotta Be Like That?

EGM: Why can't you use the grappling hook to latch onto buildings and trees?

Avalanche Creative Director Christofer Sundberg: [Using] the grappling hook on objects other than vehicles is somewhat tricky...as it instantly opens up a wide range of possibilities where it could become a technical and gameplay nightmare. The alternative would have been to set grappling points...and considering we have thousands of buildings and objects and millions of trees, the game would release by the time we have colonized Jupiter and [can] breathe through gills.

EGM: Why is the game so easy?

CS: Some feel the game is way too hard and some don't. It all has to do with balancing, and we're happy with it.... *Just Cause* offers the ability to create your own gaming experience, and you can make it very hard and you can make it very easy.

EGM: The game is beautiful, but why not add more variety to the scenery instead of just buildings and jungle?

CS: The engine supports all kinds of environments and I really don't see much that could have been added. Technically, it's been a big challenge to even squeeze everything in on the PS2 [version], and variation is an issue as it's very memory consuming.

Good: Stupid-fun parachuting and grappling stunts
Bad: Boring missions, cinch difficulty
Try It First: Download the demo in the Xbox Live Marketplace

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

CRISPIN	G. FORD	SHARKEY
6.5	6.5	7.0

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Avalanche Studios
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.justcausegame.com

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PS2/XB

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS

Is this what it's all about, Manny?

ROBERT: Is this really the first time I've played a *Scarface* game? I could've sworn I committed virtual felonies while listening to songs from the movie's soundtrack in *Grand Theft Auto III*. And *GTA: Vice City*, with its hot pink depiction of '80s excess and the Miami drug trade, is practically a parody of the 1983 film. So it's with a tall swig of irony that *Scarface: The World Is Yours* rips off the rip-offs, xeroxing the look and feel of Washington's favorite scapegoat.

The official game, however, has one thing *GTA* doesn't: Tony Montana, Al Pacino's famously gutsy Cuban crime lord. The game's version of the character (voiced by an impersonator) is like a Tony Montana action figure, complete with pull-string f***-you-meng action (via a "taunt" button). The best moments in *Scarface* are Tony's, his cocksure strut, laughable pickup lines, and post–head shot braggadocio. Too bad the other characters are completely forgettable.

Scarface spends most of its energy tweaking the *GTA* formula. Better gunplay, a slick objectives system, and the ability to have your driver bring you a car are all welcome changes. The game also revises the recipe by tying progress to profit making, an interesting idea, but one that forces you to complete hours of repetitive drug deals and side missions. The question is: Now that we're free to do as we please in a game world, can designers come up with anything besides shoot-outs and car chases?

DEMIAN: Drive around, shoot other bad guys, deal drugs—yeah, whatever. This is supposed to be *Scarface*. Where's the epic story to justify the crime of reimagining the movie's ending (and the game's beginning—turns out Tony *didn't* die)? Tony's mom gets whacked and it's a throwaway five-second cut-scene? What did writer David McKenna (*Blow*, *American History X*) *do all day?*

Ah well. *GTA* cribbed from *Scarface*, and *Scarface* returns the favor, except *Scarface* has better controls on-foot, in-car, and in-boat. This is a long, challenging game with some innovative ideas (taking control of Tony's henchmen, for one), but even the main story missions get repetitive, to say nothing of the side quests. Needs way more mountains of blow, too.

1UP.COM—SHARKEY: Having a button with which to spew profanity is a welcome addition to the *GTA* formula. Specifically, it means that, for once, the protagonist in one of these knockoffs swears more than I do while playing. The other big addition: *Scarface* presents what looks like a swing meter whenever you interact with pretty much anybody. Want to intimidate someone or, hell, make a deposit at the bank? Swing meter. Every time I try to sell blow to someone I feel like Tiger Woods. The mansion editor is also a nice touch if you like to dabble in interior decoration in between drive-bys, though it's mostly pointless. The only time I used it was to fill my office with Port-A-Potties. Weirdly, that didn't reduce my respect meter. Though *Scarface* may not be as pretty or as technically impressive as other *GTA* clones, it pulls off some decent dialogue and humor while making an attempt at bringing in a little novelty.

Push It to the Limit

Stay in your car
Tony Montana seems to be a crack shot, even when he's behind the wheel of a fine Italian sports car. If you're having trouble clearing a particularly tough shoot-out, use your car as extra armor.

Sacrificial henchman
At the start of a combat-heavy mission, have your driver deliver a car. He'll stick around and fight with you—not very well, but he makes a good bullet sponge.

Fronts: Not just for pushing yayo
Buy a front in a new area as soon as one becomes available. Sure it'll add to your bottom line, but more important, you'll be able to instantly warp to that part of the map in your stretch limo.

Buy the cigarette gunboat
The Coast Guard and rival gang boats keeping you from smuggling coke into Miami? Buy this badass superfast cruiser with deck-side machine guns to dominate the seas.

Good: Tony F***ing Montana's huge motherf***ing balls
Bad: Too many similar missions, flat supporting characters
Bad, Not Evil: Tony can't kill innocents. Thompson unfazed

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	ROBERT	DEMIAN	SHARKEY
	7.0	6.5	6.0

Publisher: Vivendi Games
Developer: Radical
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.scarfacegame.com

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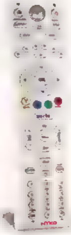

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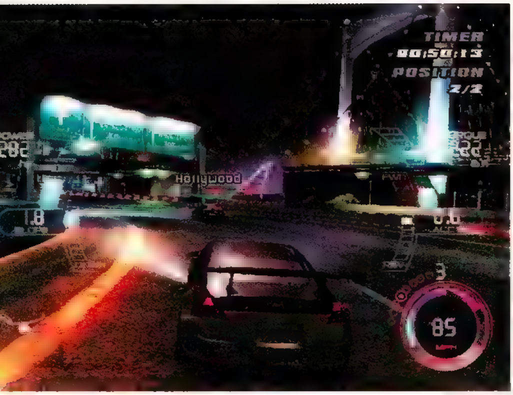
PlayStation 2

THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS

Well, that's half right



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	GREG S.	DEMIAN	JOHN
	5.0	3.5	5.0

Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Eutechnyx
Players: 1-2 (2-4 online)
ESRB: Teen

www.namcobandai.com

Good: Decent selection of cars and pimping options
Bad: Monotonous gameplay, limited race options
Would've Been Great: Back when the first movie came out (2001)

GREG S: Five years after *The Fast and the Furious* franchise first hit theaters, we finally get a game based on the license. Too bad the videogame industry's love affair with the street racing that the flick brought to the mainstream reached its boiling point a long time ago.

F&F isn't necessarily a bad game, but it doesn't have much to it. You simply travel or warp around an almost embarrassingly small city, taking part in two different types of race events—street and downhill drifting—over and over again (against only one opponent at a time). You take the money you win to buy new parts or cars, then do it all again.

Need for Speed Underground 2 did two years ago everything this game does, but with much more style and variety. *F&F* starts off with lots of potential, what with some pretty spiffy graphics, a metric ton of ways to pimp out your ride, and a few nods to the three films upon which it's based. But it all gets lost in the aforementioned monotony and the weird difficulty curve that normally leads to cakewalk-like boss battles. Pass.

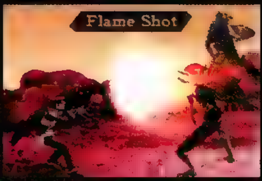
DEMIAN: *Cue movie-announcer voice*: "IN A WORLD...where illegal street racing takes place at night, et cetera, et cetera.... ONE GAME was bold enough to come out seven months after the last movie it draws its name from.... ONE GAME was stupid enough to borrow its 'inspiration' from the decidedly crappy *Tokyo Xtreme Racer* series instead of something decent-if-tired like *Midnight Club* or *Need for Speed Underground*.... ONE GAME hyped an 'authentic' and 'revolutionary' drift mechanic that was neither, due to a fundamentally poor physics model.... ONE GAME dared to offer four-player online racing that was technically functional.... ONE GAME strove to set a new standard for intolerably frequent, long load times.... And that game was—" Eh, no one cares. Parents who don't know any better will buy this at Wal-Mart, and that's it.

1UP.COM—JOHN: It "isn't necessarily a bad game," Greg? Are you kidding? How about it just "isn't necessary"? Sadly, *F&F* adds little to the genre, except possibly the most intrusive load times of any game on the system. I haven't seen a racer that requires you to go to an *option screen* to change the camera (and then endure a memory card save midgame!) in a long time. The game's biggest problem is that just about everything it offers has been done far better elsewhere, be it by *Need for Speed Underground* or even Eutechnyx's previous street racer, *SRS*. I appreciate the apparent emphasis on the drift gameplay mechanic, but like the latest movie in the franchise, the whole thing is just so contrived and uninspired.

PlayStation 2

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DEVIL SUMMONER

Runnin' with the devils



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JON	SHANE	RAY
	6.0	7.0	8.5

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Atlus
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.atlus.com

Good: Best of both action and RPG worlds
Bad: Hasn't this been done before? Like, a lot?
File Under: *Persona* (PS1) meets *Pokémon*

JON: The PS2 needs another action-role-playing game like the music world needs another Paris Hilton solo album—especially when we're talking about adding a new *Shin Megami Tensei* game to the series' already exhaustive list. And *Summoner* doesn't bring anything terribly different to the genre. Despite the game's shameless lack of innovation, however, it's actually pretty entertaining. Maybe it's the stylistic and gameplay similarities to the beloved *Persona* series that struck a chord, or maybe it's that most battles demand some strategic use of demon familiars rather than just hack-n-slash basics. I found that the care and training of your demon pen gives you enough to think about without having to get into the mind-numbing minutiae of a full-blown RPG. Plus, the little buggers serve a puzzle-solving purpose outside of battle, which helps distract you from the forgettable plot.

Don't expect too much of a challenge, though. Level-ups are frequent, and deaths in your demon family will be rare if you're the least bit careful. I admit it's no blockbuster, but *Summoner*, like Ms. Hilton's opus, still makes for a fine guilty-pleasure rental.

SHANE: If you're a role-playing fan who's never taken the plunge into the *SMT* series, you're missing out on a gloriously gothy mix of demonic plotlines, deep character customization, and the most stylish art direction in the biz. *Summoner* doesn't disappoint on these fronts, and it's actually a shockingly ideal entry point for newcomers. Blending turn-based combat with mash-happy brawling makes for more dynamic (albeit easy) battles, and the narrative feels light and funny compared to the austere *SMT* games *Nocturne* and *Digital Devil Saga*. Sadly, the game's prerendered backgrounds (think: *Shadow Hearts*) give it a dated look.

1UP.COM—RAY: While *SMT* games have traditionally been set in perfectly acceptable near-future worlds, *Summoner*'s 1920s setting works wonders. The art design and characters are great, and I was amused enough to keep playing even when the campy "Japanese detective show" music kicked in. But true to the series, it's not as forgiving a game as Jon and Shane seem to think: You'd better be skilled at minding your hit points and managing your money, or else you could find yourself irrevocably stuck. RPG nuts won't have that much trouble, though. And while I dig the real-time battles, their excitement is what kept my attention away from my health at times. Still, detectives and demons haven't seen a better matchup than in *Summoner*.

Crappy controls sucker punch an otherwise cool game.

PlayStation 2

GOD HAND

Cool hand puke

Good: Hilariously bizarre, sweet tunes, customizable combos
Bad: The controls are a complete mess
Desperately Needs: A lock-on button

MICHAEL: *God Hand* sure looks like a fistful of fun...well, until you actually get your unholy hands on it. Main brawler Gene may look (and fight) like a seasoned contender, but he controls like a washed-up wreck. You think you'd be able to move around in a circle, right? If you said "yes," you know how a good 3D game should control—unfortunately, developer Clover does not. Instead, it forces you into an awkward *Resident Evil*–style behind-the-back, can't-run-in-circles, need-a-frickin'-button-just-to-turn-around setup. And for a beat-em-up in which you have to fight multiple enemies (sometimes up to five or six at a time), it boggles my brain you can't—God forbid—lock onto enemies.

But for as much as I hated the crappy controls, *God Hand* doesn't completely fall to the punch. If you manage to master its way over-the-top martial arts, you'll be rewarded with a game that karate kicks the crap out of your funny bone—between unambiguously gay bosses, pro-wrestling gorillas, and hair-sprayed heavy metal freaks, the ensemble of eccentric enemies will have you slapping your knee with glee...or frustration. Actually, probably both.

MARK: Too bad another game already claimed the title (see page 134), because I think "WTF" would've been the perfect name for Capcom's PS2 brawler here. Stark, pixelated graphics, technical glitches (walls pop in and out regularly), and completely broken camera controls from some of the greatest developers in the business? What the f*** indeed. But it's a testament to *God Hand*'s bizarro sense of humor and shockingly satisfying fighting system—you tailor your move set and create custom combos—that I can't condemn it outright. Hardcore quirky-game fans will want to slow down for a peek at this car wreck (like Andrew below), while everyone else is better off speeding on by.

1UP.COM—A. FITCH: *God Hand* is essentially the whacked-out, late-night-cable version of classic beat-em-ups like *Final Fight* and *Double Dragon*. The ball-busting (literally!) move set makes spanking (again, literally!) salacious succubi and demonic dominatrices a blast, and the twisted sense of humor and pull-no-punches presentation puts it over the top, with lots of laugh-out-loud moments.

But like Michael says, *God Hand* has its issues. While the camera and controls never quite reach "outright maddening," they're certainly frustrating at times. And are there better technical brawlers out there? Sure. But in the end, gaming's all about having fun, and I had tons of fun with *God Hand*. If your "inner-13-year-old quotient" is high (as mine clearly is), you'll probably get a kick out of it, too.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MICHAEL	MARK	A. FITCH
6.0	5.0	8.0

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Clover
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

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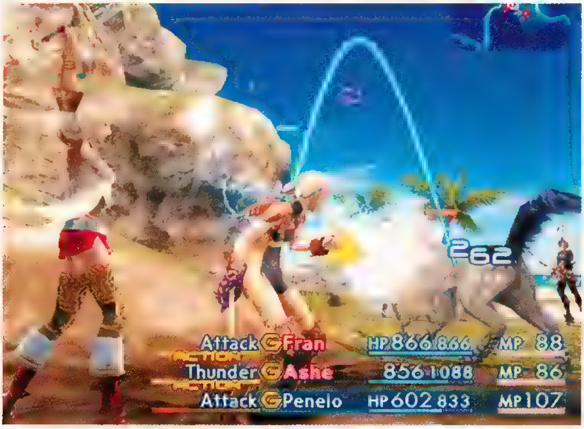
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PlayStation 2

GAME OF THE MONTH

FINAL FANTASY XII

A daring departure for role-playing's grandest franchise

SHANE: At long last, it's finally here (some two years later than developer Square Enix originally promised, mind you)—*Final Fantasy XII* arrives just in time to close the book on current-gen role-playing once and for all. And after a string of oddball *FF* offshoots (the largely recycled *Final Fantasy X-2*, the massively multiplayer online *Final Fantasy XI*, and the Mouseketeer-approved *Kingdom Hearts* games), series fans have pined for an epic worthy of the hallowed *FF* name. Well, *FFXII* certainly has grand ambitions, and it's easily among the most impressive titles ever to grace the PS2, but series vets should prepare to be shocked by just how startlingly different this quest feels from what came before.

Of course, dedicated *FF* followers already know they're in for a shock—Square Enix bravely handed the reins to a different development team for this installment, and it shows. These guys had previously made the *Final Fantasy Tactics* games (along with the *Ogre Battle* series and PS1 cult classic *Vagrant Story*), and you'll instantly recognize the distinctive look and feel of those games here. The story line, art direction, character designs, and music all adhere to a very specific artistic mold—it's a highly refined, classical, and vaguely European vibe that feels completely unlike anything the series proper has ever offered.

Luckily, the fantasy realm of Ivalice is a mighty welcoming place. An astounding amount of effort must have gone into rendering the colossal, sprawling cities, vast outdoor expanses, and labyrinthine dungeons. No modern *Final Fantasy* (save *FFXI*, which doesn't really count) has offered such a realistic sense of scale, and it makes the whole experience feel totally fresh. You actually feel as if you're traversing a very real world...it's really quite compelling, and the breathtaking visuals will have you rethinking the limits of current-gen graphics.

Nobody really doubted this team's ability to craft a beautiful world (*Vagrant Story* still looks sweet six years later), but penning a compelling, entertaining, and comprehensible story is another matter altogether. (The team's narrative track record ain't so hot—*FFT* is borderline nonsense by its endgame.) Fortunately, *FFXII*'s plot doesn't get too bogged down with confusing minutiae. It's a largely straightforward tale, dense with political intrigue yet surprisingly easy to follow. Until the ending, that is—things fall apart a bit during the crucial final hours.

It's vital that an RPG deliver cool characters (cosplayers gotta dress up like *someone*, right?), and, compared to the colorful, diverse casts of recent *FF* titles, your party members in *FFXII* seem a tad...mundane. It's tough to even pinpoint who the main character's supposed to be—headstrong, fashion-forward orphan Vaan seems the obvious protagonist, but it's really all about Ashe, the feisty princess. Sadly, neither of them is particularly interesting, and the story as a whole lacks the emotional punch you'd expect. Uneven voice work (featuring some embarrassing mispronuncia-

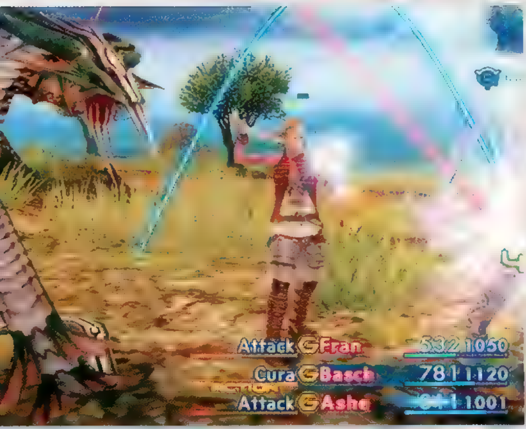
Good: Stunning visuals, impressively believable world
Bad: Camera problems, frequent loading
Odd Inspiration Source: *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHANE	BRYAN	ANDREW P.
8.5	9.0	9.5

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.finalfantasyxii.com



tions—*marquis* is a French word, guys) certainly doesn't help matters....

So, the world impresses and the narrative suffices, but what about *FFXII*'s gameplay? Given the development team's history of crafting encyclopedically complex game mechanics, the battle system feels remarkably simple. Instead of warping you to a separate battle screen for encounters, *FFXII* places all combat directly on the field. As enemies appear, your party engages, taking turns attacking as you run around waiting for your action meter to fill up. After *FFX* and *X-2* took the traditional *FF* active-time battle in clever new directions, this feels like a serious step back. If anything, it's more like *Final Fantasy XI*'s online combat—shallow, repetitive, and dull.

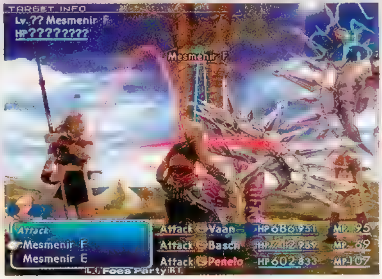
Or at least it feels that way at first—as *FFXII* progresses, it introduces two gameplay systems, the License Board and Gambit systems (scope the sidebar) that deepen the experience. The License Board enables you to completely customize your fighters' abilities, but it's nothing more than a rehash of *FFX*'s Sphere Grid, only far more vague and less user-friendly. The Gambit system, however, feels very inventive—you're more or less programming the A.I. for your entire party with exacting detail. It's clever stuff: Once you've got the hang of the system, normal combat becomes a complete nonissue. Your preprogrammed party will barrel through enemies, stealing loot and healing itself along the way. You can quite literally put the controller down and watch your warriors plow a path to victory.

In a way, that's cool—but at the same time, so much of the strategy and challenge of past *FF* encounters is surrendered here. Plus, the battle system's crucial weakness becomes all too clear during boss encounters. Here, you'll generally need to turn your preset Gambit strategies off, as you're again forced to micromanage your party members. And the unadulterated combat feels undercooked. Mist attacks, this game's version of over-the-top Limit Break special moves, are terribly unbalanced: overpowered at first, yet far less useful later in the game. Likewise, summon spells simply aren't worth it—their massive magic point cost makes them pointless. A troublesome camera (a tragic *Final Fantasy* first!) compounds matters even further.

If this all sounds terribly negative, don't get too discouraged. The wildly reworked combat may lack the depth of previous games, but it's so innocuous (outside of boss battles, at least) that you almost don't notice it. Instead, you can focus on spelunking the game's mammoth (100 floors big enough for ya?) dungeons and dabbling in the seemingly endless optional quests. Ultimately, no one will question the ambition that went into crafting *FFXII*—it's a giant, beautiful game that takes a lot of risky chances. Most of them succeed. Some fans will love this new direction...but others will be rest assured that *FFXIII* (PlayStation 3) will be a return to classic form. ➤

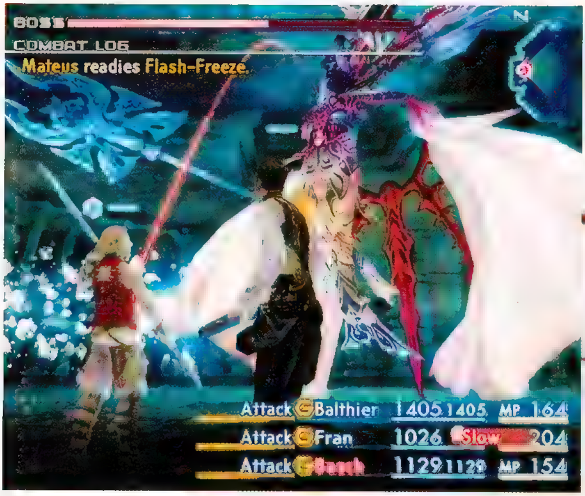
Calling All Hunters

Even though you can plow through *FFXII* in roughly 45 hours, in true series form you'll find a crapload of extra stuff to do. Aside from the standard side quests and tracking down secret summons (which are called espers here), this RPG includes the Clan Primer, which enables you to go on optional hunts all across Ivalice. Obviously, with every success comes payment in the form of money and items. But unless you achieve the rank that opens up rare hunts (where the rewards are much greater), it may not be worth it. Once you sign up to take on such a task, you first have to search out the person who originally posted the job (which can be a pain in the ass if he or she is located on the other side of the map), get the final go-ahead, and then venture out (with little direction) on the hunt. Like we said, the time investment here may not equal the payoff.


TARGET INFO
Lv.?? Mesmenir F
HP????????
Mesmenir F
Attack
Mesmenir F
Mesmenir E
Foes Party
Attack Vaan HP686 951 MP 25
Attack Basch HP 712 984 MP 69
Attack Penelo HP602 833 MP 107

■ **Having to babysit for the camera in a *Final Fantasy* feels awfully odd. Expect to constantly hit the R3 button (aka the right analog stick) to recenter the view.**

FINAL FANTASY XII (CONT.)



Mateus readies Flash-Freeze.

Attack Balthier 1405 1405 MP 164
Attack Fran 1026 Slow 204
Attack [illegible] 1129 1129 MP 154

■ Status ailments make a big return in *FFXII*. Make sure you carry a vast array of antidotes, alarm clocks, eye drops, and other sundries early on in the game.

➤ **BRYAN:** Shane, you go right ahead and keep talking about how much you can't wait for lucky number 13—I'm perfectly content exploring *Final Fantasy XII*'s wonderful world of Ivalice and everything it has to offer. And for me, it all starts with the game's shockingly mature, politically driven narrative: Instead of focusing so much on your party members, this RPG concentrates on the bigger picture facing its feuding kingdoms and the struggles happening within them. Like so much else here, it's quite a departure from the established series norm, as you'll never connect with major *FFXII* players Vaan and Ashe to the same degree as with Cloud/Aerith (*FFVII*) or Tidus/Yuna (*FFX*), but it winds up being a much-welcomed change in story direction.

And since these guys can't stop discussing the game's ever-controversial combat system, allow me to chime in: I guess I'm the middleman on this debate, because, on the one hand, I completely buy into this quicker style of play for the everyday skirmishes (plus I'm really glad to see *FFXII* ditch the whole concept of random battles). On the other hand, during boss fights I kinda miss the slower-paced, more methodical approach of the older *FF* games. Also, Andrew's crazy if he thinks that simply switching the system from "Active" to "Wait" takes you back to the good ol' days; while "Wait" does let you pause the action midfight, these encounters can still get out of control in a hurry (especially if that particular boss brings some backup). But if the combat is gonna be speedy, I know that, thanks to the new Gambit system, party members will make smart decisions during battle (heal, attack the strongest enemy, and so on).

Now, as I'm sure that people will continue to have differing opinions on the combat, you can't argue about how damn amazing this game looks. From its lively outdoor backdrops to the striking architecture found in its cities and dungeons, this PS2 title will even please—at least visually—those with next-gen *FF* firmly on the brain. Ya know, like Shane....

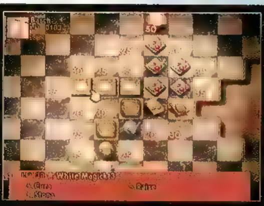
1UP.COM—ANDREW P: In the five long years since *Final Fantasy X*, I've gotten hungry. Sure, I sampled a little bit of the online time sink known as *Final Fantasy XI*, but its bland flavors weren't for me. The wait for *Final Fantasy XII*, though, was like dangling a delicious steak just out of my reach...for three years. Now that it's been served and I have consumed, I can say that this is the most ➤

The Opening Gambit

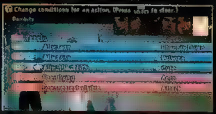
Final Fantasy XII eases you into its more complex gameplay systems—the License Board and Gambit system—but it doesn't do a terribly good job of explaining them. Both are crucial to your success, however, so you'll want to wrap your head around them as soon as possible.

The License Board represents your characters' growth: It allows you to master new weapons, spells, abilities, and Mist attacks while also upping your stats. It's completely up to you how you develop each character, and everyone has an even playing field with identical boards. Early on, focus on getting basic equipment, spells, and HP buffs. It's pointless to waste License points on high-end weaponry you won't see for 20 hours.

As for the Gambit System, you're basically programming simple "if this, then that" statements that your party will automatically follow. As soon as possible, be sure to create a gambit that heals characters when their HP falls below a certain level (our suggestion: 40 percent) and one that steals items from wounded enemies. Also, take care when organizing your gambits—the order of operations is crucial, so place healing and reviving gambits before combat commands.



Restore HP to one HP Critical ally.



Change conditions for an action. (Press [illegible] to clear.)

■ *FFXII*'s License Board (left) and Gambit (below) systems allow for complete customization of your characters' weapons, abilities, and automated actions.

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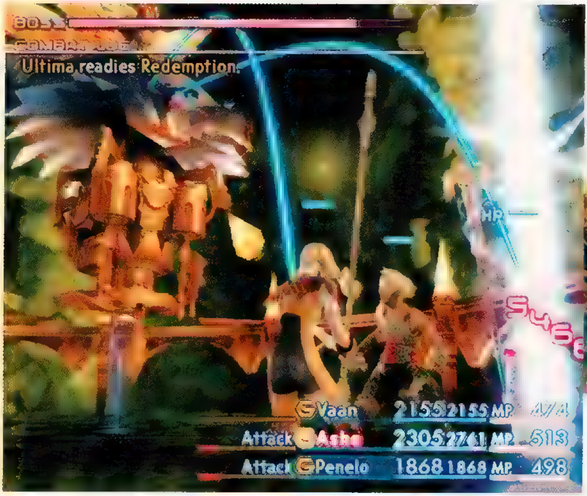
FINAL FANTASY XII (CONT.)

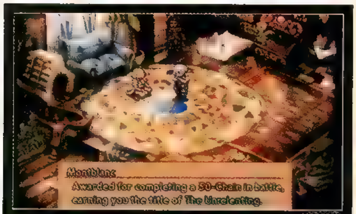

BOSS
Ultima readies Redemption.
Vaan 2155 2155 MP 474
Attack Ashe 2305 2761 MP 513
Attack Penelo 1868 1868 MP 498
HP

Those eye-searing summon spells don't come easily in *FFXII*—prepare to fight each beast in a grueling (and often unfair) battle before it joins your force.

satisfying *Final Fantasy* experience I've ever had.

Teeming with tactical brilliance, *FFXII* is a rigorous workout for your brain. I have to disagree with Bryan and Shane: By replacing antiquated random battles with a faster-paced massively multiplayer online (MMO) style of combat, Square is finally taking the training wheels off the series. Everything still feels like *Final Fantasy* (potions, spells, party formation, skill development, and so forth), but combat is a much more complex—and consequently rewarding—experience. In the olden days, you could take your sweet time deciding what actions to take in battle. Now, you and your party spot an enemy, advance to the attack, and reap the rewards all without pause. As a result, the pace of the game is more fluid, and you're always connected to the game world. The other guys might consider the Gambit system the training wheels, but what Square is essentially doing is spreading around the strategy to include battle preparation as well as the actual battle itself. It's not that you're merely watching the game play itself; you're analyzing your skills and gambits to look for weaknesses or inefficiencies. Plus, having additional enemies unexpectedly join the fight or bosses doling out unwanted status effects keeps you on your toes. Being as they're not as much into MMO games as I am, I can see their argument. But by turning gambits off and switching the battle system from "Active" to "Wait," it's pretty much just like the old *FF* again, and everyone can be happy.

Aside from the camera issues and largely forgettable soundtrack, *XII* really hits the spot for me. A well-crafted cast of characters, an intricate and politically charged plot, and a fresh take on combat...my compliments to the chef.


Montblanc
Awarded for completing a 50-Chain in battle, earning you the title of The Unrelenting.

What's This DS-looking Thing?

Nope, this isn't a screenshot of the newly announced *FFXII* spin-off *Revenant Wings* for Nintendo's dual-screened handheld. It's actually the Sky Pirate's Den, a submenu in the PS2 title that fills up with cutesy characters as you reach in-game milestones, such as casting magic or selling items a certain number of times. Hmm, seems like someone on the dev team is a big fan of Xbox 360–style achievements....

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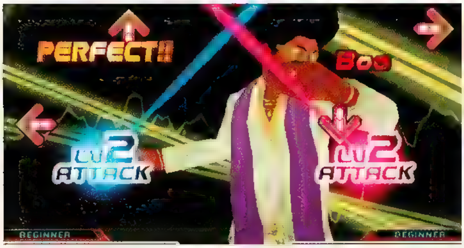
PlayStation 2

ONLINE

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION SUPERNOVA

More like "eh, better-than-averageNOVA"



Make more enemies by attacking your opponent in Advanced Battle mode.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JON	SHIVAM	JARED
	6.5	8.0	4.5

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Players: 1-2 (2 online)
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.konami.com

Good: Battle mode increases the likelihood of physical violence
Bad: It's mostly just a bunch of new songs
Crown Jewel: Cyndi Lauper video featuring Captain Lou Albano

JON: As a guy with size 15 feet, I was forced into early *DDR* retirement after *DDRMAX 2*, thanks to a combo of my clumsiness and PS2 dancepad proportions. This is the first time I've spread out the plastic mat since, and—new songs notwithstanding—I'm surprised by how little has changed. The most notable addition is a 1-on-1 battle mode, which works like *Dr. Mario* or *Tetris Attack* in that you can dump extra steps, screwy screens, and speed changes on your opponent by doing well. It's not executed so smoothly (the attacks are haphazard), but it's a nice addition for parties and competitive pals.

For what it's worth, online play is back again, as is the usual smattering of single-player modes for counting calories, running marathon sessions, and creating your own routines. Personally, I enjoyed making my own games, like trying to pass the hardest mode while watching some great throwback-video backdrops from David Bowie and Cyndi Lauper. Maybe the next release will incorporate my Video Distraction Challenge™ as a formal mode, but my big feet and I would be OK with Konami making *SuperNOVA* the *DDR* swan song.

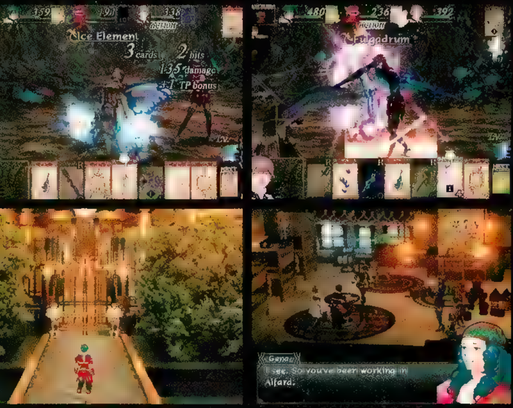
SHIVAM: I don't think Jon appreciates the nuances here enough; *SuperNOVA* is the best home *DDR* in years. The game sports a superlative song list full of surprising licensed tracks—including "Funkytown" by Lipps, Inc. and "Let's Dance" by David Bowie—as well as some modern stuff by Franz Ferdinand and Kelly Clarkson. Better still, the game drops the *Extreme* games' silly interface and returns to the superior classic *DDR* one. After resurrecting the series in arcades and now coming home, *SuperNOVA* really is a gift to the loyal fan base, myself included. Even better: The hardcore will be pleased to know that Konami has hammered out the timing issues that plagued the arcade release.

1UP.COM—JARED: Shivam, Shivam, Shivam...where to start? Missing a vast majority of the songs introduced in the arcade version of *SuperNOVA* somehow manages to be the least of the problems here. More troubling is that the game locks up a significant chunk of the goods, ensuring that casual players will only ever see about half of what *SuperNOVA* has to offer. And unlocking anything involves going through the new, irritating Dance Master challenge mode—do we really need a hard-to-read chart to figure out what to do? To top it off, *SuperNOVA* sports a horrible difficulty balance, offering a bunch of cream-puff stuff before ratcheting up the difficulty to hardcore-level extreme. What this amounts to is a classic example of how a simple yet typically enjoyable experience can fall apart due to poor game design.

GameCube

BATEN KAITOS ORIGINS

Success isn't always in the cards



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHANE	MICHAEL	MILKMAN
	7.0	5.5	4.5

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Monolith Soft/ tri-Crescendo
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.nintendo.com

Good: Intriguing story line, copious subquests
Bad: Outdated visuals, tricky learning curve for combat
Sound Familiar?: Guillo's actor also voiced Kratos (*God of War*)

SHANE: Assuming your GameCube still exists somewhere under that disgusting layer of debris, you might actually consider excavating it for *Baten Kaitos Origins*. Veterans of the 2004 original will definitely want to make the effort—as a prequel, *Origins* does a remarkable job fleshing out the first game's already dense narrative. Then it ups the ante by juggling two parallel story lines that coalesce to reveal catastrophic plot twists that force a complete reanalysis of the whole *Baten Kaitos* universe. Really, it's a good story, and a well-written and finely acted one at that.

Those same returning fans may feel perplexed, though, by the reworked battle system. Whereas each character in the first game had his or her own deck of cards representing equipment, attacks, and spells, now the entire party shares one central pool. This single deck makes battles far more chaotic (a brisk countdown gives you split seconds to make timed combos) and considerably less predictable (an unlucky deal forces mass discards). Of course, proper deck construction alleviates most of this drama, making the battles a speedy, strategic thrill. These other guys didn't even give it a fair shake....

MICHAEL: Shane needs to reshuffle his thoughts on the crappy card combat. Equipping armor and weapons—let alone attacking enemies—via a bunch of cards is beyond stupid. And since your characters share one full deck in battle, I ended up chucking more cards than I used to make room for each character's specific cards, which transformed simple turn-based battles into long, tedious affairs.

Speaking of tedium—I sure got sick of using the same three characters for the entire game. More party members would have meant a greater variety of attacks, spells, and combos. But disregard Milky's complaints about the voice acting; it's top-notch stuff. It's just a shame the wonky battle system forces this game to fold.

1UP.COM—MILKMAN: You guys must be season-ticket holders to the local high school's theater productions, 'cause you obviously crave cheese with that whine. I haven't encountered so many boring prerendered backgrounds, talking heads, bleh voice acting, laughably inept cut-scenes, and, um, card battles since...the last *Baten Kaitos*. As if the formula weren't tedious enough, wading your way through its convoluted plot is barely enough to keep interest high as you assemble your custom card deck. If you followed the first game, you'll undoubtedly enjoy what's offered here. (Really, do GameCube RPG fans have any other choice?) But gamers looking for ways to fill the empty void in the gaping maw of their Cubes would do well to just sit still until the arrival of *Twilight Princess*.

PSP

BOUNTY HOUNDS

Your recommended daily fill of hacking and slashing

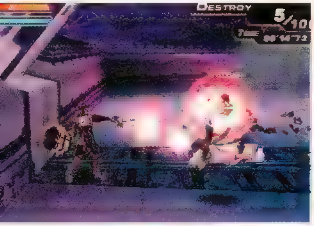
Good: Slick character models, stylish cut-scenes, solid action...
Bad: ...that grows dull, *ugly* backgrounds, no co-op
Even Worse: The alleged ending

G. FORD: In a few paragraphs, you'll be reading the words of a couple of guys who are far too forgivable of some seriously repetitive combat. Don't get me wrong. *Bounty Hounds*—a mostly slick-looking action-RPG that skews heavily toward the alien-eradicating action—manages quite well by its steady shoot-em-up and melee mix. In fact, the act of cutting swaths through swarms of enemies takes on a rhythmic, almost soothing quality at first as you effortlessly dispense stat-affecting force fields while alternating among varied attacks. But don't think the action stays fresh forever. By the time I was dodging and killing my thousandth one-trick extraterrestrial, the spells of boredom became a common occurrence. This is further compounded by the need to continually warp back to base to sell inventory-filling items and modify weapons, which not only stunts the rush, but also results in plodding backtracking.

Special mention goes out to the crap camera, which absolutely implodes during boss fights, and the lame one-on-one versus mode instead of co-op. You kidding me? We're talking epic missed opportunity here.

JAMES L: *Hounds* might label one stage "Laser Ordnance Base," but I prefer to call it my happy place. Seriously, this big dork thinks plasma blasting robotic bad guys is awesome. The game doesn't require you to spend too much time leveling up and upgrading weapons (though you can certainly take your time with that)—it cuts right to the action. What I like are the numerous features that both keep you busy and add to the button-mashing, like putting up force fields that create a biosphere-like area where bad guys can become as slow as Pauly Shore. Not all the weapons are great—hell, the finicky flamethrower looks like you're offering a light instead of trying to incinerate bad guys—but I don't have too much to complain about otherwise.

1UP.COM—SHARKEY: Sometimes life's greatest pleasures are the simple ones. Like hacking, slashing, and looting. Kill 2.8 metric craploads of robots, take their stuff, and shoot their buddies with it. Between the setting and combat mechanics, *Hounds* may feel like *Phantasy Star Online*, but it's missing the best part of that classic: the addictive co-op play. And most of the colors. *Hounds* might actually use more grays and browns than the famously überbland *Quake II*. The backgrounds are drab, but the game puts a shocking number of enemies onscreen without a hitch. Now, if only I could figure out where all my party members go when they're not needed for a cut-scene. They always *act* like they were around the whole time, but they sure as hell weren't there helping with the robot genocide a few seconds prior.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

G. FORD	JAMES L.	SHARKEY
5.5	7.5	7.5

Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: XPEC
Players: 1 (2 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Teen

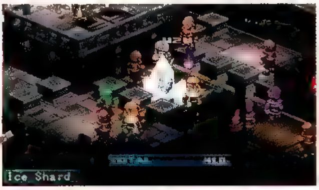
www.namcobandaigames.com

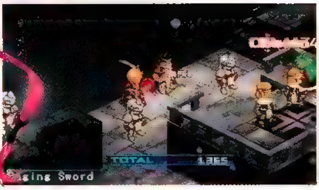
4
CHARACTERS
SQUARE ENIX.

PSP

SPECTRAL SOULS

Turn-based spectating





THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	MICHAEL	SHOE	RAY
	4.5	2.5	3.0

Publisher: NIS America
Developer: Idea Factory
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.nisamerica.com

Good: Choice of three armies, good battle system
Bad: Load times, load times—and oh, yeah—load times
The Enemies Are So Stupid: They'll mistakenly hit their allies

MICHAEL: Two words: Disc access. I'd say more, but I think I need a little more thought on this one...could you give me a couple of seconds? Or better yet, a couple of minutes? Hell, how about next month? Oh, fine—I suppose I'll wander into the endless waiting of *Spectral Souls*...after I access my thoughts.

OK, I'm ready...so if you think PSP games generally have shoddy load times, pull up a seat (and a puffy pillow), because you'll be doing a helluva lot more waiting than playing. Everything (and I mean just about *everything*) is plagued with the dreaded "disc access" message, to the point where the game is almost unplayable...at least for those who aren't blessed with powerful patience (i.e., someone who doesn't overlook blatant problems because of adorable anime chicks).

Sorry, strategy fans, *Souls* completely misses its goal. Had publisher NIS America actually ported the PS2 version of this game, I would have given it at least two points higher (assuming the load times were fast), because, honestly, the game isn't *that* bad. The grid-based battle system works great, and choosing between three different armies is a cool concept. Too bad those damn two words had to suck the soul out of this game.

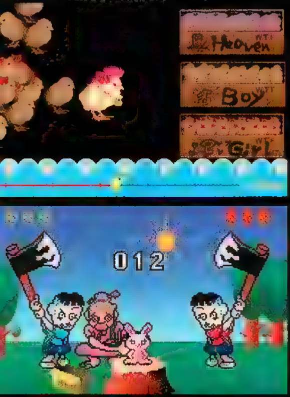
SHOE: I watched every tutorial video. I even read the manual. But throughout playing *Souls*, I never felt like I completely understood it. The game floods you with options and features that I never really got the full hang of. And they want me to wade through constant loading for this? For crying out loud, the PSP has to [...*Disc Access*...] every line of dialogue, [...*Disc Access*...] each new screen, and [...*Disc Access*...] every single animation in battle! You know it's bad when the PSP's screen saver kicks in *when you're in the middle of a fight*. The combat system is neat (you can stall, then unleash attacks that will combine with others to form new moves), but I have better things to do with my time than to wait for [...*Disc Access*...].

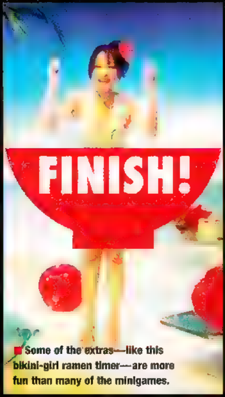
1UP.COM—RAY: A game of chess could take forever, but when you pick up a piece, it doesn't take an hour to move it. But that's what *Souls*' slowdown-laden mess is like. *Souls* is one of the worst-optimized PS2-to-PSP ports I've played. Was there a QA strike? Text loads line by line, making progression laughable. The story is more "grown-up" than other strategy-RPGs (like the cutesy *Disgaea*), but the mechanical English translation fails to make it exciting. *Souls* could've been competent portable strategy: Things like the ability to switch between kingdoms and get different sides of the story is something you don't see often, but the technical issues are huge roadblocks to anything good.

PSP

WTF: WORK TIME FUN

Wait, the F stands for "fun"?





Some of the extras—like this bikini-girl ramen timer—are more fun than many of the minigames.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	CRISPIN	SHIVAM	KAREN
	5.5	4.0	6.5

Publisher: D3Publisher
Developer: Sony CEI
Players: 1-8
ESRB: Teen

www.wtfisthisgame.com

Good: Some minigames are silly fun...
Bad: ...but others are more tedious than traffic school
See One Guy's *WTF*-Playing Robot: www.baitohell.com

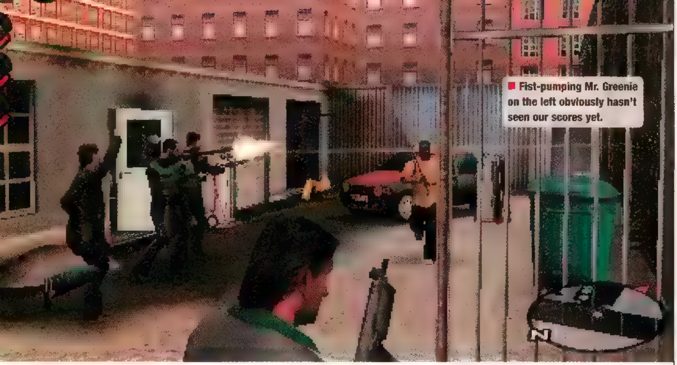
CRISPIN: Time to fess up to a dereliction of duty: I actually tricked coworkers into playing this game for me. And finding willing victims wasn't hard: Who wouldn't want to play a collection of bizarre-beyond-words minigames in an outlandishly titled PSP game (*WTF* supposedly stands for "Work Time Fun," but yeah, right).

Why my laziness? Because some of the "minigames" here are actually mind-numbing tests of mental endurance, about as fun as working in an Indonesian sweatshop. (One ballpoint-pen-sorting minigame *is* set in a sweatshop.) But as one of my pressed-into-service coworkers says, "Playing these games is like chewing on a mouth sore: It's not pleasant, but you can't stop doing it."

If these games are strangely addictive, I blame it on *WTF*'s paycheck aspect. Every game ends with a payday based on your performance, and you use that cash to buy more minigames (40 in all). Trouble is, you purchase these games from gumball machines that spit out more collectible trinkets than actual minigames. Nothing's more frazzling than saving up a load of money, dropping it into the gumball machine, and getting a bathroom scale. What a waste of my coworkers' time.

SHIVAM: *WTF* manages to change the art of playing minigames into a mindless chore, much like the summer jobs I had throughout high school (which may also explain its Japanese title, *Baito Hell 2000*, which translates to "part-time-job hell"). Consider, you start with four available games and must play them until you earn enough money to try to (randomly) unlock a new game. The unlock system sucks, though: You only receive pennies for every pen you cap, baseball you catch, or log you split. Whereas *WarioWare* enables you to pick it up, play it, and put it down minutes later fully satisfied, *WTF*'s extended sessions go on for what seem like full eight-hour shifts, with you checking the clock every 10 minutes, hoping you can go home.

1UP.COM—KAREN: Here's a game aimed at the bored-at-work generation that's set in a hellish office where your job is to chug through minigames—seems kinda meta to me. *WTF* is more adult and stylish than its genre cousins, but it also suffers from the same "now what?" problem. Gamers will end up choosing probably only two minigames to play to earn in-game moolah, because *WTF* offers no story, drive, or reason for them to explore every crevice of the game's library. Most of the minigames are simple but delightfully absurd, accompanied by cheeky commentaries and edgy graphics. Its greatest success: It validates that under the PSP's cold, sleek veneer is plenty of room for whimsy and loony fun.



Fist-pumping Mr. Greenie on the left obviously hasn't seen our scores yet.

PSP

GANGS OF LONDON

SHAME OF THE MONTH

London calling...don't answer

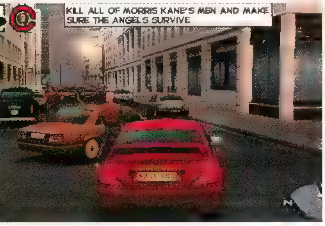
Good: A realistic re-creation of London in your pocket
Bad: A realistic re-creation of monkey poo in your pocket
Ye Olde Arcade: Minigame more fun than the headline act

ROBERT: I've seen enough of Brit director Guy Ritchie's movies to know that people across the pond employ a variety of bizarre slang, but do gun-toting, drug-slinging British gangsters really use the word "bumclot" as an insult? According to *Gangs of London*, an open-world crime-sploitation game by the makers of *The Getaway*, they do. I guess that's why 50 Cent, not 50 Pence, is a millionaire. Also, *Gangs of London* sucks ass. For any Brits who might be reading, the phrase "suck ass" is a pejorative that, while describing a heinous sex act, also implies poor performance. How does *Gangs of London* perform poorly? At a basic level, the game's controls are a mess. Touchy car handling translates millimeters of analog nub movement to drastic hand-over-fist turning. And when you get out of the car, you face the opposite problem: Your little polygonal hoodlum moves like Grandpa Moses.

Gangs of London's main event, divided into several selectable gangs, is a series of minimissions, simple tasks kept mercifully short. They cover a range of objectives, from sneak-into-the-building to shoot-a-bunch-of-dudes (lock-on works, luckily) to drive-until-you-lose-that-car. Actually, that's the whole range.

JAMES L: OK, here's how I imagine the brainstorm for this turd went down: "Let's make *Grand Theft Auto*, set it in London, and give it squad-based controls (who cares if that complicates things?). We'll give players the choice of superoriginal gangs, like the Russian mob or Chinese Triad! We won't allow for attacks immediately after blocking (who needs that?), so the character will have to dance back and forth like an extra in *West Side Story*—that'll be fun. Oh, we should add turn signals to promote safe getaway driving. Then, in case players get sick of all this, we'll give 'em some minigames so they can learn how to play darts...and maybe forgive us while we burn in hell."

1UP.COM—JOHN: Unlike the pop culture sources from which it appears to draw its inspiration, *Gangs of London* is not an amusing, intelligent observation of gang culture in England's capital, nor is it a wry and clever piece of social commentary woven into the fabric of an enjoyable gameplay experience. It is simply a portable piece of ugliness that lacks humility, wit, or any entertainment value whatsoever. It is singularly unpleasant in the way it handles its subject matter, and it lacks the style or panache to carry its inadequacies with any dignity. Amazingly, it manages to take all of the complaints leveled against *The Getaway* and focus them with laserlike precision into an experience devoid of fun.



KILL ALL OF MORRIS KANE'S MEN AND MAKE SURE THE ANGELS SURVIVE

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

ROBERT	JAMES L.	JOHN
3.5	3.0	2.0

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Sony CEE
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Mature

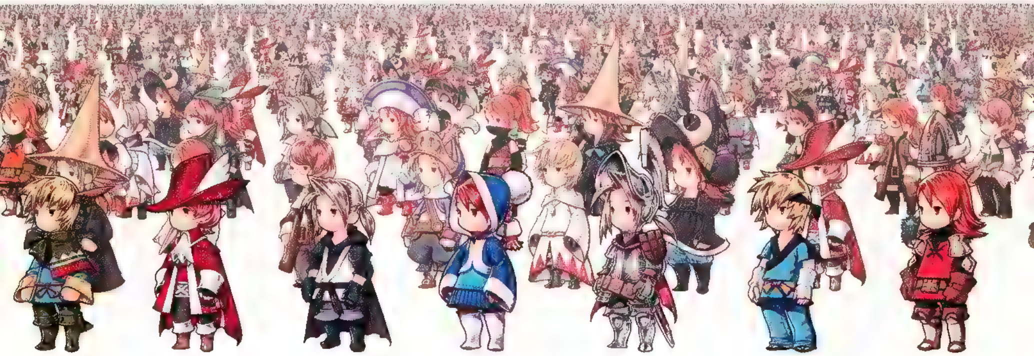
www.playstation.com

23
JOBS

SQUARE ENIX.

279,

POSSIBLE PARTY



FOUR SOULS SHALL BE BLESSED WITH LIGHT, AND SO IT SHALL BEGIN…

Refia

We still promised the crystal we'd go on our journey. And... I don't want to be a smith just yet.

- A dynamic job system brings a nearly infinite number of party variations. Each character can assume any of 23 jobs found throughout the adventure.
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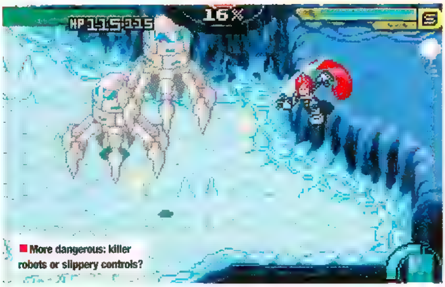


More dangerous: killer robots or slippery controls?

DS

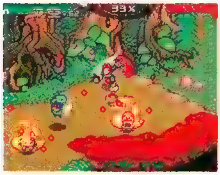
SCURGE: HIVE

Almost famous

Good: Like an unofficial *Metroid* sequel with a few new ideas
Bad: Isometric view turns simple jumps into diagonal disasters
Déjà Vu: Female bounty hunter fights space parasite

ROBERT: You can't be a gaming geek without picking up all kinds of obscure, useless terminology. "Isometric" is one such geek expression, no doubt familiar to gaming obsessives of an older vintage. Years before the advent of real 3D graphics, game developers used the isometric perspective (see screens) to insinuate depth in a 2D world. *Scurge: Hive,* a *Metroid*-flavored adventure game that revisits this technique, reminds me how frustrating the once-popular perspective was.

But first: *Scurge* is an otherwise exceptional effort, marrying *Metroid*'s upgrade-hunt formula (while swiping the "evil parasite versus female bounty hunter" scenario) with a battle system more in the style of a role-playing game. As you progress through *Scurge*'s space-station dioramas, you'll pick up weapons suited to damage certain classes of enemies, turning plain vanilla shoot-outs into fast-paced games of rock, paper, scissors. Unfortunately, this is where the perspective begins to grate. Since your view of the action is always at a diagonal, you need to hit the D-pad at precise angles, something I never managed to master. It mars what could have been a below-the-radar hit.



MICHAEL: Imitation is the sincerest form of failure. Oh, is it flattery? Oops! Well, I suppose the folks at Nintendo should be flattered by this foolish attempt to re-create the brilliant *Metroid* series. But if I were them, I'd be more frustrated that not only does *Scurge* shamelessly steal *Metroid*'s bombshell-bounty-hunter formula, but it manages to mangle it by tacking on that dated, impossible-to-navigate isometric perspective. As Robert points out, for an exploration-based game, it's hard to ignore this foolish design decision. Had this been a straight 2D platformer, I might have liked it a wee bit more, because it can be fun at times. But the repetitive combat and insistence on finding random key cards will likely keep this sleeper from waking up.

1UP.COM—JEREMY: If videogames are art, then *Scurge* belongs to the neoclassical movement. Although it's neither a sequel nor a remake nor based on any classic series, *Scurge* feels in every way—in a very *good* way—like a great 16-bit game. You'll discover a little *Metroid* in the kick-ass heroine and plotline, a little *Alien Syndrome* (arcade) in the blistering speed and emphasis on shooting, a little *Solstice* (NES) in the isometric exploration and puzzle solving. Unfortunately, its shortcomings are annoying in any era. In addition to the headache from the perspective, backtracking repeatedly through the same environments can be a bit of a slog. Even so, it's still pretty boss.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

ROBERT	MICHAEL	JEREMY
6.0	6.0	7.5

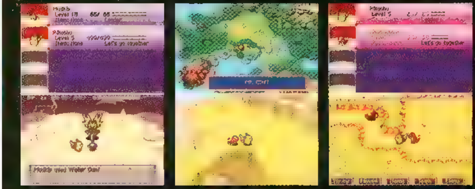
Publisher: SouthPeak
Developer: Orbital
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.southpeakgames.com

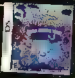
DS

POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: BLUE RESCUE TEAM

Dungeons and Dragonairs



Good: Faster gameplay than standard *Pokémon* titles
Bad: Losing all of your stuff after you die
***Red Rescue Team* on GBA:** Is basically the same game



BRYAN: I can't think of a much worse fate than getting turned into a Pokémon: pesky kids always tossing you into battles, the whole evolution thing (they're like pubescent teenagers—they can never get comfortable with their bodies). But after playing *Mystery Dungeon,* I guess such a transformation isn't *so* terrible.

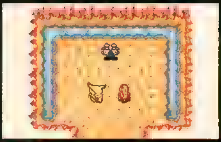
Playing as one of these cute critters, you make your way through rounds of randomly generated dungeons, and unlike traditional *Pokémon* bouts that can drag on, all the fights here are quick. Don't think this equates into repetitive button-mashing battles; you still need to think strategically when selecting from your ever-growing list of Pokémon and their signature moves. It's just a shame the game doesn't involve the touch screen to spice up skirmishes (you use it only to scroll through menus).

Still, worthless DS functionality ain't the real issue here—that'd be resource management. For one thing, storing and retrieving items is too much of a hassle. And second, whoever came up with the idea of permanently losing your valuables every time you die (which makes going back to finish the job that much tougher) should have their head examined.

JENNIFER: Anyone still *actually* into Pokémon these days (certified lunatics though they may be—sorry, Ray) will find in *Mystery Dungeon* a solid action-RPG with a familiar cast of characters, a decent story, and plentiful adventuring. Everyone else, unfortunately, runs the risk of being bored stiff. The combat is tactical enough to be mildly interesting—you can link moves together, use all sorts of different spells and items, and customize your party to suit your preferred style of play. But the do-gooder rescue missions and find-an-item-or-person quests get too repetitive far too quickly, and the multiplayer aspects (when your party's in trouble, a friend's team can rescue you) are cooler in theory than practice.

1UP.COM—RAY: Lord help me, but I couldn't get enough of this game (admittedly, I'm a sucker for all those adorable Pokémon). Of course, the simple gameplay isn't made for everyone, even with *Mystery Dungeon*'s improvements to the formula. The "friend rescue" system is brilliant (regardless of what Jennifer tries to tell you), and I love how you can handily orient the map however you wish.

More important, this *Pokémon* entry is a haven for soul-sucking leveling up, although the typical series' incentives—trading and battling—have been stripped (at least it's still got a story to keep you going). But it's by sticking to solid RPG basics (clearing dungeons and leveling up) that *Mystery Dungeon* delivers the addiction.



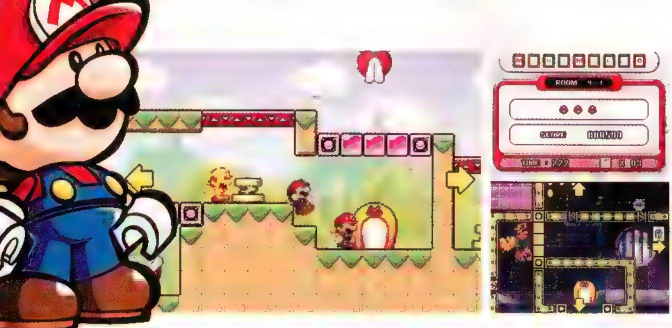
The rest of this story? Pikachu and Charmander giving this poor guy a swirly.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

BRYAN	JENNIFER	RAY
6.5	6.5	8.5

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Chunsoft
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com

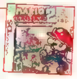


DS

MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG 2: MARCH OF THE MINIS

Want levels done right? Gotta build 'em yourself

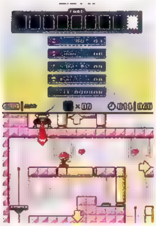
Good: Touch-screen controls, build your own levels
Bad: Simplistic level designs, lame boss fights
Aspiring Gamemakers: Add a point to the review scores for you

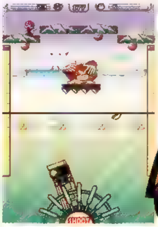


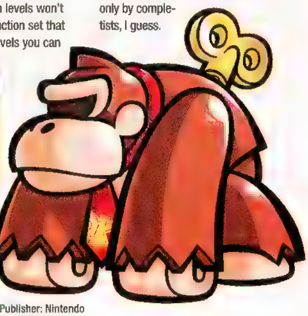
MARK: The goal of this puzzle/platformer—whose namesakes it unfortunately doesn't live up to—is similar to that of its GBA predecessor: Guide a number of tiny, lemminglike "mini-Marios" past obstacles and safely to the exit. This time, thankfully, you have direct control over your minions—you can use the touch screen to make them start, stop, change direction, and jump, as well as to manipulate the environment (spin pipes, extend bridges, etc.) quickly and easily. *Minis* also marches out new hazards, game mechanics, and enemies at a steady pace—problem is, the levels rarely combine these aspects in inspired ways. Safely getting out most of your minis is simple, even your first time through later levels. Doing it perfectly with all the point bonuses is another matter, but without a decent reward for doing so, who cares? Also, the minigames and boss fights are inexcusably lame, simply variations on the same template. If you have the patience, though, the level editor is robust and intuitive. Your excitement at the idea of making your own stages (or downloading friends' creations over Wi-Fi) is the true test of how much you'll enjoy this otherwise simple game.

JENNIFER: Sliding my puttering mini-Marios around almost 100 puzzle mazes didn't initially strike me as a fabulous way to pass the time. But as with last month's *LocoRoco* (PSP), the slow, steady, and perfectly bite-sized pace of *Minis* ultimately won me over. I like how it's pretty easy to complete any of the levels, but achieving a gold star on each and collecting all the various coins and cards require strategy that's just challenging enough to stimulate the noggin here and there. Like Mark says, the boss battles are a little too basic, and the unlockable Whac-A-Mole imitation levels won't dazzle. But the construction set that allows you to create levels you can then share with others lifts this one out of mediocrity.

1UP.COM—ANDREW P: I was only mildly impressed by the first *Mario vs. Donkey Kong*—it was fun and provided tons of levels, but something about it was off. Not so with No. 2: The variety and challenge of the levels is again a hit (dunno what Mark's thinking), and the new touch-screen controls and play mechanics (like walking on walls) make the sequel a meatier experience. Yes, it's possible to speed through most levels, but I found myself trying to complete the bonuses, such as having the minis walk nonstop. The only frustrating by-product of stylus control is that the game sometimes misinterprets lines you make for move and jump commands as stop commands, ruining your nonstop bonus—a gripe that's shared only by completists, I guess.







THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MARK	JENNIFER	ANDREW P.
6.5	7.0	8.0

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.mariovsdk.com

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*According to GameRankings.com average scores of 2003 - 2006 hockey video games.

DS

MAGICAL STARSIGN

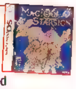
Sign this star off

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	MICHAEL	JENNIFER	A. FITCH
	5.5	6.5	6.0

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Brownie Brown
Players: 1 (2-6 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com

Good: Cool-looking cut-scenes
Bad: Ho-hum dialogue, ugly characters
Sequel To: A Japanese-only GBA game



MICHAEL: *Magical Starsign* wanted me to cuddle up to its cutesy characters, but one look at the butt-ugly designs made me question whether I was supposed to say "aww!" or "aah!" While the kiddie eye candy is pretty sour, the gameplay is simplistically sweet...maybe too much so, actually. For a turn-based role-playing game developed by ex–Square Enix folks, it's a shame it feels so shackled to primitive ideas. Aside from the nifty planetary gimmick (different characters power up when their planets are aligned correctly in the solar system), the battle system is a repetitive regurgitation of classic RPG standards: Attack, use magic, toss an item—hell, whatever you do, it's not much fun. Well, the Wi-Fi mode is somewhat enjoyable—you and five of your buds race to find a treasure chest.

The biggest problem, however, is the wonky stylus control. Hey, I like using the stylus, but I don't need to play a 20-hour RPG with a stylus in my hand. Nor do I need to spend five minutes fiddling with a frickin' menu because I accidentally chose a "Frog shirt" instead of a "Cat suit."

JENNIFER: File this one with *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon* (page 138). It's yet another action-RPG with some decent basic gameplay, a cutesy story line, a fun twist here and there, and way too much repetition to keep sophisticated gamers interested for long. The twist—powers are influenced by the game's swiftly tilting planets—makes individual battles moderately compelling as you try to time your moves with favorable planetary alignment. But the spell effects, while lovely, are unskippable and slow, making battles longer than they need to be. Combine that with too much reliance on repetitive combat to level up your characters and a limited arsenal of attacks that takes its time to expand, and *Magical Starsign* loses its magic after a few good hours.

1UP.COM—A. FITCH: *Magical Starsign*'s premise—essentially *Harry Potter* with Japanese RPG archetypes—had me worried. You've got the tough rebel, the anthropomorphic bunny, and the robot (a robot in magic school? Wha—?). But the clever, charming script injected surprising life into these clichés, and the astrology-based battles were different and challenging enough to hold my interest. And all was right with the world....

...Oh, except it *wasn't*! Because the stylus controls practically *every damn thing in the game*, making the simplest of RPG maneuvers, like talking to the right townsperson, a Hagrid-sized pain. Silly controls aside, I had a decent time with *Magical Starsign*. But I would've had a better time if I'd been allowed to play it the old-fashioned way.

DS

MECHASSAULT: PHANTOM WAR

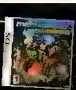
Phantom menace

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	MARK	JAMES L.	PATRICK J.
	4.0	6.5	3.0

Publisher: Majesco
Developer: Backbone
Players: 1 (2-4 local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Teen

www.majescoentertainment.com

Good: Ability to get out and pilot different mechs
Bad: Terrible graphics, unpolished gameplay
Why: No online multiplayer?



MARK: If Microsoft had a handheld, I'd swear that this edition of its *MechAssault* action/shooting franchise was part of a plot to make the DS look bad. Its blocky robots, herky-jerky animation, and pixelated, barren landscapes serve as a sobering reminder of just how pathetic 3D graphics can appear on Nintendo's machine. The standard controls feel archaic as well, with the setup utilizing the DS' four buttons to move the camera bringing back memories of pre-second-analog-stick shooters (and not good ones). The stylus-based setup works better, but without tweaking options, I was never quite comfortable.

Luckily, it isn't *all* bad. You can get in and out of mechs, your flight suit, and even tanks as you wish, dumping one for another to fit the needs of your situation. Some clever (if frustrating) minigames simulate hacking into computer systems, and the game has a surprising amount of voice acting. But mostly the gameplay comes down to trading fire with enemies who have way too much health and not enough variety in battle tactics. To top it off, multiplayer, while decent, has no online or cartless download modes—and trust me, three of your friends are *not* gonna own this one.

JAMES L.: To me, nothing quite compares to piloting a giant robot in a cockpit that comfortably seats any mech-loving man-child. *Phantom War* does a decent job with the controls of these beasts, as you can activate your vehicle's special features or switch guns with relative ease. Plus, jetpacking while aiming is a cinch. I particularly like how some missions utilize your assorted gizmos, like when you "go-go Gadget" your claw to cling onto giant mechs and hack their terminals. However, the glitchy A.I. and tedious missions that suddenly increase in difficulty (such as when you have to destroy wave after wave of mechs to save your base) will have you climbing out of that otherwise cozy cockpit at times.

1UP.COM—PATRICK J.: I'm not normally an angry person, but when someone takes the reliable joys of the DS and the *MechAssault* franchise and makes them both bad, my vision goes all red and blurry. I found *Phantom War*'s aiming to be difficult and inaccurate with either control setup (James must be some sort of savant), and the glitchy, ugly graphics didn't exactly make things better. Expect to read the targeting info often to get any idea of what you're fighting.

Also lame is the "strategy." For most battles, I just stood outside the A.I.'s "engage" range and slowly tore enemies apart with missiles, immune to retribution. But when I couldn't be cheap, the game turned the tables. My advice: Spend your cash on some robot toys and play with them instead.

DS

TOUCH DETECTIVE

Coppin' a feel for justice!

Good: Adorably quirky characters
Bad: Need to solve too many puzzles with random guesses
Doubles As: A great name for a P.I.-themed porno

DS
TOUCH DETECTIVE

JON: Playing a game called *Touch Detective*, I was expecting something that made really creative use of the touch screen—and maybe something skewing to an older audience—but I was a little miffed to find myself limited to guiding a little girl around a quaint town. Mackenzie is the go-to gal anytime the residents of her nutty little hamlet have a mystery, so you primarily spend your time directing her toward key objects and people that can help you get the job done. Along the way, witty dialogue and colorful characters make each chapter an addictive little trip peppered with the occasional problem-solving test. Sometimes you come across clever hints at a satisfying solution. But every mystery also has at least one or two superobscure puzzles, and poor clues and red-herring distractions offer no help in finding their illogical resolutions. I found myself retracing my steps through town repeatedly, sampling every object and person in sight hoping to trigger a solution. I am certainly a big fan of the game's vibrant, anime-inspired graphics, but with no replay value and a lot of frustrating, nonsensical puzzles, *Touch Detective* isn't quite worth solving.

JENNIFER: *Touch Detective* sounds simultaneously fascinating and perverse, and it is, but not in any good way. You explore a quiet, pseudo-Gothic town, pointing your stylus at anything and everything to solve mystifying crimes. It sounds all right, sure, until you find yourself eating magic mushrooms, spying on an old guy in a trench coat buying clothes for a young girl, and inflating a clucky landlord with a bicycle pump. Yup—it's that good. The bizarre mental leaps required to determine what comes next on your point-and-click path defy any ordinary logic. Without a walkthrough, I was toast, and even with hints, I found the stories so nonsensical that the whole game became annoyingly tedious. Even the touching is overrated; most of the time you're merely clicking to advance dialogue. Put this one away, far away—case closed.

1UP.COM—JEREMY: *Touch Detective* puts conventional wisdom to the test—is the DS *really* the ideal system for point-and-click adventures? The game has its strengths—the dialogue is understated despite the unrelenting wackiness on display, and the art is an odd blend of Edward Gorey and Hot Topic. Unfortunately, like the others said, it suffers from the same flaws as every point-and-click adventure ever: It's full of choke points where your progress grinds to a halt until you click on just the right out-of-the-way hot spot or perform some arcane, counterintuitive series of actions. So yeah, the DS is great for this kind of game. Now if only the genre itself were better.

I have an uneasy feeling.
ITEM
Episode 1
Episode 2

The real mystery is: How did everything in this town get so damn cute?

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JON	JENNIFER	JEREMY
	6.5	3.5	5.5

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Success/Beeworks
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone 10+

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#1 RATED NBA GAME*

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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*According to GameRankings.com 2003-2006 average review scores of NBA simulations.

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The games that were too late... or too little

THE GODFATHER

XB360/PSP • EA • ESRB: M

Current-gen gangsters already mobbed up the streets of New York, and now Xbox 360 and PSP dons will get to...well...play basically the same game. OK, so the 360's *The Godfather* looks a bit better and minimally improves upon the current-gen versions (more missions, weapons, and so on), but it's not like the tweaks are worth the offer. *The Godfather Mob Wars* on PSP actually adds a ridiculous new card-based strategy mode that stupidly interrupts the story. Fuggedaboud it!

Bottom line: If you want to join the family but skipped out on the current-gen versions, the 360 version is the best way to enjoy the extorting. The PSP version, however, is better off sleeping with the fishes.

Blitz: The League

XB360 • Midway • ESRB: M — Like most ports, don't expect any major changes to Midway's arcadey down-and-dirty gridiron. This version includes a bunch of new all-star teams, 360 achievements, and...well, that's about it.

Bottom line: Unless you're a *Blitz: The League* rookie, you won't find much reason to toss this pigskin again.

Spy Hunter: Nowhere to Run

PS2/XB • Midway • ESRB: T — Wait... is it a bad sign if a company doesn't send us reviewable copies of a game based on a movie that got pushed to next year? If you have to ask, you deserve this ho-hum tie-in, which does nothing to revive the hurtin' *Spy Hunter* series with its wonky on-foot missions starring the Rock.

Bottom line: Problems abound both in and out of the loose-controlling vehicles.

ENEMY
ENEMY
1P

Power Stone Collection

PSP • Capcom • ESRB: T — *Power Stone*'s fast-paced chuck-and-duck fisticuffs don't miss a punch on the PSP. Both the original and sequel translate well (the controls perfectly fit the PSP's one-analog setup), and the local Wi-Fi multiplayer lets friends join the fight.

Bottom line: Uh, two (awesome) games for the price of one? Only a goof would skip this stone.

Crash Boom Bang!

DS • Sierra • ESRB: E — Hey, Sierra, think you could repurpose this lame party game as a retirement party game for Crash? The story mode boards are needlessly complex and time consuming. But the more fundamental problem here is that only a handful of the 40 minigames are any fun—the rest are a mess.

Bottom line: Not so much a bang for your buck as it's a boom on your wallet.

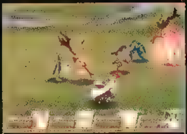
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories

PSP • Rockstar • ESRB: M

Though chances are good that PSP's latest *GTA* pseudo-port, *Vice City Stories*, will hit stores shelves while this issue is still atop of your bathroom stack, we didn't get review copies. We did, however, get to play a near-final version, and, as expected, it felt a lot like *Liberty City Stories* but with some tweaks. Similar to any fast boat in the series, the Jet Ski controlled squirrelly when it came to making turns. The helicopter, however, fared much better. The two biggest problems from the previous game—a tough-to-control camera and disappointing on-foot shooting—could still use some love, though.

Bottom line: It's hard to not be awed while flying over decadent Vice City—what Rockstar does with this hardware astounds. Just be mindful of the aforementioned headaches.

nerd games



Tales of the Abyss

PS2 • Namco Bandai • ESRB: T

Ah, the *Tales* series. Home to the most hardcore, hard-to-please Japanese RPG fan base this side of *Suikoden*. Thankfully, *Tales of the Abyss* seems to have atoned for (most of) the sins of last year's *Legendia*. We'll most likely have a full rundown next issue.

Bottom line: Better graphics, an improved battle system, and a stronger localization—this looks like the return to form *Tales* fans wanted.

Children of Mana

DS • Nintendo • ESRB: E

Remember the *Zelda*-like *Secret of Mana* (SNES)? Well, expect some different trappings here. Colorful visuals aside, it's just your garden-variety dungeon-based hack-n-slash, not a story-driven action-RPG. Sure, it has a plot, but it's lost amidst 20 hours of beating the crap out of wee beasties with pals.

Bottom line: Think of this as *Mana* for children—a basic adventure to whet appetites for PS2's *Dawn of Mana*.

Mage Knight: Destiny's Soldier

DS • Namco Bandai • ESRB: E10+ — It's not *Advance Wars* or *Final Fantasy Tactics*. This strategy game has a style all its own, with tons of warriors to collect and a deep, but fun, hex-based combat system.

Bottom line: The all-stylus controls work fairly well, but the combat can get a little confusing because the interface isn't that intuitive and your characters' abilities change as they take damage.

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*According to GameRankings.com 2003-2006 average review scores of College Basketball video games.

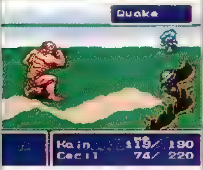
reviews archive

History, repeated

Xenosaga's Jr.: Finally, a name we can pronounce.

FANTASY ISLAND

For years, *Final Fantasy* fans have been divided as to which system features the golden age of the beloved series. From 2D sprites to CG cut-scenes to just playing as a Taru Taru online, the *Final Fantasy* games have evolved with the power of each system. But does that mean the quality has also evolved? We take a look at which home has been the most beneficial to the RPG heavyweight. (Oh, main series games only—sorry, *Mystic Quest*—and, as always, all scores out of 10.)



Super Nintendo
Final Fantasy II (IV)
Final Fantasy III (VI)
8.5 average

PlayStation
Final Fantasy VII
Final Fantasy VIII
Final Fantasy IX
9.6 average

PlayStation 2
Final Fantasy X
Final Fantasy X-2
Final Fantasy XI
9.1 average

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)			AWARD
50 Cent: Bulletproof G-Unit Edition	PSP	Fans will enjoy unlocking tracks—everyone else gets waves of generic enemies to shoot	4.0	5.5	4.0	
Astonishia Story	PSP	Looks and plays like a 12-year-old role-playing game—oh, wait—it is	3.0	5.0	4.0	
Big Brain Academy	DS	Brain-buster with tons of minigames and multiplayer	8.5	9.0	7.5	Silver
Blade Dancer: Lineage of Light	PSP	Another crappy portable role-playing game—nuff said	3.0	4.5	2.0	
Bomberman	PSP	Old-school fun, but lacks variety and, thankfully, the frightening *Act: Zero* makeover	6.5	5.5	7.0	
Bomberman Act: Zero	XB360	A coldhearted, future-shlocky redesigned look is the cherry on top of a crap game	3.0	3.0	2.0	
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	PSP	Bright graphics and classy, classic games fill this portable powerhouse	8.5	8.5	9.0	Silver
Contact	DS	Despite a lack of guidance, *Contact* is one of the most intriguing DS RPGs to date	7.5	7.0	8.0	
Chromehounds	XB360	Big mechs with big guns in big, boring environments	6.0	5.0	8.0	
Dance Factory	PS2	Changes your favorite tunes into dancepad-ready hump-shaking routines—poorly	3.0	7.0	2.0	
Daxter	PSP	This bright, beautiful action-platformer feels cramped by the PSP's limitations	7.0	7.5	7.5	
Dead Rising	XB360	Anything goes weaponwise, though that won't stop your greatest foe—the clock	7.5	7.0	8.0	
Deep Labyrinth	DS	A janky DS role-playing game with tacked-on stylus features—sigh	2.0	3.0	7.5	
Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII	PS2	This first-ever *Final Fantasy* shooter couldn't hit the side of a chocobo barn	5.0	5.0	4.0	
Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories	PS2	The cult-classic strategy-RPG returns, hardly revised from the first game	7.0	8.0	6.5	
Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime	DS	Packs in hilarious in-jokes (think *Paper Mario*) and addictive (if overly cute) tank battles	7.0	8.5	8.5	Silver
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	XB	This adventure title offers an immersive narrative but no game to go with it	4.0	6.5	4.0	
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	XB360	Flawed, but ultimately a fun RPG with a great story and a huge world to explore	9.0	9.0	9.5	Gold
Enchanted Arms	XB360	An engaging but typical Japanese RPG that fails to utilize the 360's power	7.5	5.5	6.5	
Field Commander	PSP	Sure, it's a rip-off of *Advance Wars*, but it's so good that you won't care	7.0	7.5	9.0	
Final Fantasy XI Online	XB360	This online-only sequel has all the things you love—and hate—about the genre	7.0	6.5	7.0	
FlatOut 2	PS2/XB	The poor man's *Burnout* series sequel serves you another helping of sloppy jalopy	5.0	4.5	6.0	
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	XB360	Amazing war-is-hella-fun shooter with great multiplayer. Next gen is finally here!	10	9.0	9.5	Gold
The Godfather: The Game	PS2/XB	*Grand Theft Auto: Gangster*. Atmospheric, faithful to the films, but a bit cheesy	8.0	8.5	7.5	Silver
Hitman: Blood Money	PS2/XB	The bald assassin returns with some great level design but a hurtin' save system	8.0	8.0	7.5	
Kingdom Hearts II	PS2	Everything an RPG sequel should be, starring all your Squenix and Disney favorites	10	9.0	9.5	Gold
Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	XB360/PS2/XB/GC	Sleepy A.I. and iffy vehicle levels aside, the Force remains intact with this sequel	6.5	7.5	8.0	
LocoRoco	PSP	Lack of level variety capsizes the joy of rolling around the game's lovable fat blobs	6.5	7.5	8.0	
Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-earth II	XB360	A controller-friendly strategy port with tons of treats for Tolkien nerds	8.0	7.5	7.0	
Madden NFL 07	XB360	Not even the awkward Superstar mode can make *Madden* fumble	7.5	8.5	7.0	
Major League Baseball 2K6	PS2/XB/GC	Reworked the swinging and hitting but forgot to help fielding and baserunning	7.0	6.5	7.5	
Mario Hoops 3-on-3	DS	Fun touch-screen b-ball is hampered by uncooperative teammates (just like the NBA!)	6.0	6.5	6.0	
Me & My Katamari	PSP	The PSP's controls hobble the Prince's ball-rolling, garbage-grabbing magic	7.0	5.5	7.0	
Mega Man ZX	DS	Nonlinear world and easier levels help prevent *Mega Man*-of-the-month syndrome	6.0	7.0	7.5	
Metal Gear Acid 2	PSP	A short, streamlined, card-based tactical roleplayer that stars Mr. Snake	8.0	9.0	8.5	Silver
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	PS2	A great story and worthwhile additional content raise the bar for rereleases	10	10	9.5	Gold
Metroid Prime Hunters	DS	Samus looks great on the DS, but she can be awkward to control in first-person	7.5	8.0	7.5	
NASCAR 07	PS2/XB	Entertaining, but sluggish online and poor simulation	7.0	4.5	6.0	
NCAA Football 07	XB360	A faithful update but with fewer features than the current-gen version	7.0	7.5	7.0	
NHL 07	XB360	New analog-stick-based controls break the ice for next-gen hockey	8.0	7.5	8.0	
NHL 2K7	XB360	Dearth of innovation leaves the annually solid series just plain frozen against *07*	6.0	6.5	6.5	
New Super Mario Bros.	DS	A refreshing mix of classic gameplay with tons of multiplayer	10	9.5	8.0	Gold
Ninety-Nine Nights	XB360	Even nine nights would be pushing it to spend with this unoriginal hack-n-slasher	4.5	4.5	6.0	
Odama	GC	This mash-up of pinball and strategy (with voice commands) is more strange than fun	7.5	5.5	4.5	
Okami	PS2	Have yourself a howling good time with this *Zelda*-esque masterpiece	9.0	9.5	9.0	Gold
Pac-Man World Rally	PS2/GC	Pac-Man and friends offer an enjoyable (though unexceptional) ride	6.5	6.0	5.0	
Prey	XB360	Despite creative ideas (portals, wall walking), this shooter runs out of steam too soon	6.5	7.0	8.0	
Point Blank DS	DS	It's a port of a light-gun game—but without the lightgun	7.0	6.0	7.0	
Rengoku II: The Stairway to H.E.A.V.E.N.	PSP	Open door, kill enemies, repeat—designing robots is *almost* enjoyable, though	3.0	2.0	4.0	
Rockstar Games Presents Table Tennis	XB360	Ping-Pong done right—but the lack of extras will leave you wanting more	7.5	7.0	8.5	
Rule of Rose	PS2	Despite the dog-guided twist, this bland survival-horror game is nothing special	4.5	5.0	4.0	
Saints Row	XB360	The game has got *GTA* down pat, walking the fine line between gangsta and poseur	8.0	8.0	7.0	
Samurai Warriors 2	XB360/PS2	More accessible than its hack-n-slashing *Dynasty Warriors* counterparts—but still dull	3.5	4.0	6.0	
Star Fox Command	DS	A railless *Star Fox* with tactical elements? Cool innovations but not fully flight safe	6.0	6.5	7.0	
Suikoden V	PS2	Slow to start and a bit dated, yet a compelling RPG with collect-'em-all fun	6.5	6.5	6.5	
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	PS2/GC	The *Monkey Ball* series jumps the shark by tacking on tedious platforming	3.5	4.5	5.0	
Super Princess Peach	DS	A shiny new *Mario*-style adventure that needs to take the difficulty up a notch	7.5	7.0	8.0	
Tekken: Dark Resurrection	PSP	True-to-the-series brawls and quick loading times make for a great portable fighter	8.0	8.5	8.0	Silver
Tetris DS	DS	Classic puzzler brought to the DS, but with only one new mode for the touch screen	7.5	7.0	9.0	
Tomb Raider: Legend	PS2/XB	The titular raider is back, swinging and clinging in this solid tomb-robbing game	8.5	8.5	8.0	Silver
Tourist Trophy	PS2	*Gran Turismo* on two wheels, this racer offers realism with a steep learning curve	6.5	7.0	8.0	
Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins	PSP	Old-school cheap-death gameplay doubles as a convenient swearing enhancer	7.5	[illegible]	4.5	
Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth	PSP	Port issues aside, it's the best role-playing experience on the PSP	6.5	8.0	8.0	
Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria	PS2	The six-years-in-coming sequel offers a daunting but rewarding battle system	8.0	9.0	8.0	Silver
Xenosaga Ep. III: Also Sprach Zarathustra	PS2	Namco's epic space-opera RPG series reaches a fittingly apocalyptic conclusion	7.5	7.0	8.0	
Yakuza	PS2	Repetitive combat issues shouldn't detract from the richly woven mobster story line	6.0	8.5	8.5	

*Games in red are previous Game of the Month winners.

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SEANBABY'S

THE SAGA OF UWE

A tribute—and spurned challenge—to the author, filmmaker, boxer

Uwe Boll makes terrible movies. Anyone who tells you otherwise is Uwe Boll. Unfortunately, he's not a lovably bad auteur like Ed Wood. He takes videogames and butchers them into movies with sad results (seen *BloodRayne*? Don't!). And since people on the Internet hate normal things, they superhate Uwe Boll things. Message boards are filled with descriptions—usually using wacky words like "cheese" and "shrubbery"—of how he should be torn apart. Normally, an artist victimized by this kind of internet hate has no choice but to live his or her life knowing that somewhere, an unbelievable wuss has a cute imagination.

Uwe Boll, however, is no ordinary artist. He challenged the world to a fight, saying that anyone who posted nasty articles about him can petition for a chance to kick his ass. The five winners will fly to Canada to box him in his upcoming film, *Postal* (he's already beaten one critic). I think the world's film cameras can charge Uwe Boll with rape, but this is a pretty awesome move. He's doing what every celebrity has wished he or she could do: punch critics in the face. In contrast, Kevin Smith's reaction to his critics is crying into a breast pump.

Uwe is a matchmaking genius. Because in the history of the world, there will never be someone who is both violently offended by a filmmaker's lack of reverence for the *Alone in the Dark* franchise *and* who is also capable of hurting anyone. Check among yourselves. Uwe is supposed to be a former boxer, but I have no way of knowing. My normal method of research, Google, only spits out "sucks" and profanity when I enter his name. Out of simple karmic fairness, though, if he's this bad at making movies, he's got to be amazing at every single other thing in the world.

Uwe was going to promote his publicity stunt on G4's *Attack of the Show* by boxing one of the hosts. Again, he's a matchmaking genius, because everyone on TV is 3 feet tall. If you were watching *Attack of the Show* during the time I cohosted, you might have noticed that I could have leaned over and eaten host Kevin Pereira. A producer from the show remembered this and called me asking if I'd come on and fight Uwe. I train in Muay Thai and jujitsu, so I think boxing is to fighting what Hungry Hungry Hippos is to fighting, but—holy crap!—I couldn't pass up getting my fist near the mouth that shouted "action" on the set of *House of the Dead*.

Uwe, learning that he wasn't fighting a midget, asked for my age, height, weight, and fighting experience. I e-mailed this information, along with the reassurance that the Holocaust survivors got together and agreed he was the worst thing to come out of Germany. I figured this would make him mad enough to ignore that I'm several weight classes above him in F-List Celebrity Boxing. It didn't. After reading my stats, he suddenly couldn't make it on the show. There was a short discussion of flying me to the set of *Postal*, but I'm not holding my breath. Uwe is the one making the Nerd Combat rules, and rule No. 1 is: Uwe only hits people who don't explode Uwe's face when they hit back.

Uwe has given a huge opportunity to a small group of people. Do you realize that if they f*** him up hard enough, they could halt production on what, without question, will be the worst movie ever? That's as close as any boxing match has come to saving the world since *Rocky IV*. But before you read the headline "Filmmaker Unable to Finish Crap with Foot up His Ass," here's a special look back on his first three videogame adaptations.

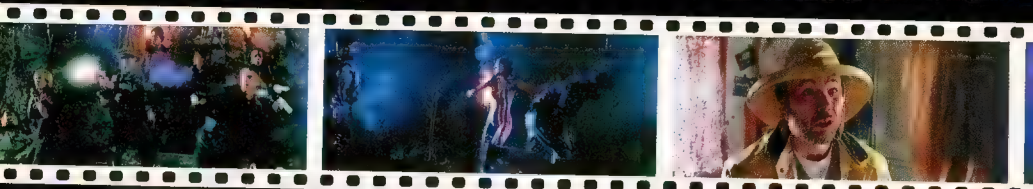
House of the Dead

Starring: The bad guy from *Beverly Hills Cop II*, Clint Howard

Before this movie, Uwe Boll was completely unknown. After this movie, he was still unknown except to the grumpy theater owners who shipped the reels back the Monday after it opened. Audiences left this movie so fast that theaters have switched to playing *House of the Dead* instead of using a fire alarm.

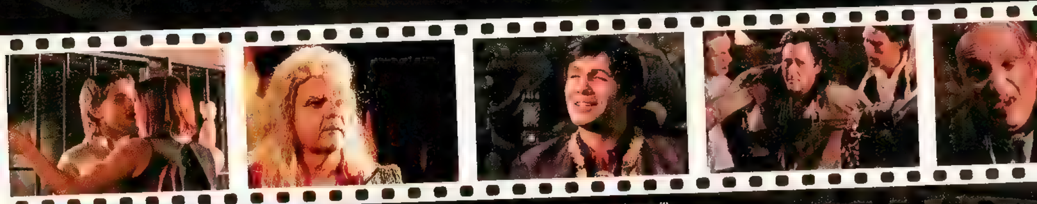
The script is about 10 pages long, with 80 more stapled to the back that read "shoot ze zombees while plays ze techno" in color crayon. The actors occasionally say something stupid, but most of the movie is taken up with zombie fights set to house music. Sounds rad, sure, but the makeup artists apparently all died of shame, so a third into the movie, most of the zombie deaths are represented by cutting to footage from the actual video game. I'm serious. Before they die, the zombies make insane shifts between awkwardly prowling and long-jumping, and very little of it seems to have anything to do with the nonzombie characters.

And then Uwe gets a *Matrix* camera. Oh, Jesus. If you thought you were bored watching idiots click toy guns between clips of a videogame, wait until you see a camera spin around those same idiots in slow motion. Without this movie, who would ever know that they hated rotating around an Asian girl a dozen times while she kicks zombies in the chest? My favorite moment of time-filling desperation



■ If you only see one Clint Howard zombie movie this year, make it...anything but *House of the Dead*. Watch reruns of *Gentle Ben* for cryin' out loud.

Alone in the Dark: Christian Slater's darkest comedy since *Heathers*.



If *BloodRayne*'s potent sex scene doesn't get female viewers pregnant, then Meat Loaf and Billy Zane's awesome hairpieces will.

comes when one of the characters has a long flashback, recalling every single scene of a zombie battle *he is still standing in the center of.* I'm serious *again.*

Despite every aspect of this movie being bad, the stunt work was exceptional. Instead of aiming off camera, the actors were content to fire blanks directly at the back of one another's heads and straight into the camera. Maybe in addition to directing and producing, Uwe dabbled in the film's safety coordination.

Alone in the Dark

Starring: Christian Slater, Tara Reid, Stephen Dorff

Uwe's bad filmmaking goes so far beyond bad producing and directing. For example, it's clear that the German-to-English translator he hired only knew the word "overact." But his decision to cast Tara Reid as a scientist—that's what makes Uwe the champion of bad decision-making. It's not that I'm against Tara Reid being cast as a scientist. It's fine as long as you treat it the same as if you're casting a baby as a rock star. I could see Tara Reid in *The Nutty Professor That Just Took Her T**s Out* or maybe this summer's *The Stupid Bitch Scientist!*

So, yes, Tara Reid mispronouncing science-y words in glasses might take you out of the story. Not as much, however, as the writer's decision to name the guy who falls into the spooky trapdoor "Marco." They must not have the same swimming-pool games in Germany, but over here, the tension in a horror scene dies when the actors start screaming "Marco!"

Alone in the Dark is a true celebration of overacting. Whether they're looking at a computer screen or gaping at a computer-generated joke of a monster, Uwe's actors spaz with their faces and bodies. Maybe he thought he was producing musical theater. "Squint at ze artifact, Christian Slater! Harder! Squint harder, dammit! Now, Tara, you vil fall down on ze floor for no reason! Now get up, zen fall down again! Ah! Look out! Now it's ze monster! Cut! Perfect!"

I know what you're thinking. Please, though, before you lobby to make it illegal for Uwe to touch a camera, remember that America was founded on the freedom of expression—even Uwe Boll's. That said, this couldn't have been what our forefathers had in mind back when they burned retards like Uwe for being warlocks.

BloodRayne

Starring: The *Terminator 3* chick, Michael Madsen, and...Ben Kingsley?

I'm going to try to keep this analogy simple because I think it's important everyone understands: After you've seen two Uwe Boll movies, watching a third is like jamming a third coat hanger into your urethra. It's certainly possible, but every instinct in your body will keep you from doing it. *BloodRayne* is a culmination of all mankind's suck technology.

Uwe decided to tone down the over-directing he did in *Alone In the Dark* and instead had all the actors recite their lines from cue cards in Renaissance faire accents. Most of the sword fights seem to end when one stuntman dies of boredom, and like in his other films, Uwe uses jump cuts instead of fight choreography, still hoping that two people gently bonking swords will look awesome if he only shows them half a second at a time.

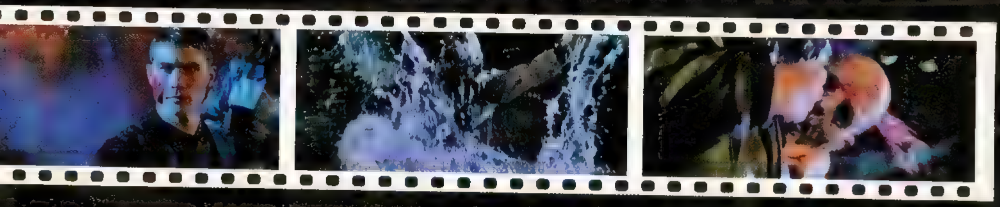
There's an epic love scene where BloodRayne has sex against the bars of a jail cell, unique because the door almost bangs off its frame several times. As is normal with Uwe's movies, it's hard to tell if this is from bad set design or BloodRayne's vampire-powered hips. Uwe decided not to glamorize sex, and he truly captured the awkwardness of doing it in front of an awful film crew in a vampire costume. While BloodRayne bangs her partner against the bars, he grinds his teeth and occasionally twitches. He's so clumsy, I felt like I was watching my memories of 9th grade. "Make love to her! First, make ze funny face! Now twitch! Twitch! Now apologize and avoid ze eye contact in shame!"

And cut!

No matter what the subject matter of the game it's based on, each of Uwe's movies ends up being mysteries. Who gave him the money for this? Why did Michelle Rodriguez's agent not do a simple IMDB search for "Uwe Boll"? And why does he want to get revenge on the world by punching people? Why not simply make a movie at us? A Uwe Boll video about auto safety could kill us all in a week.

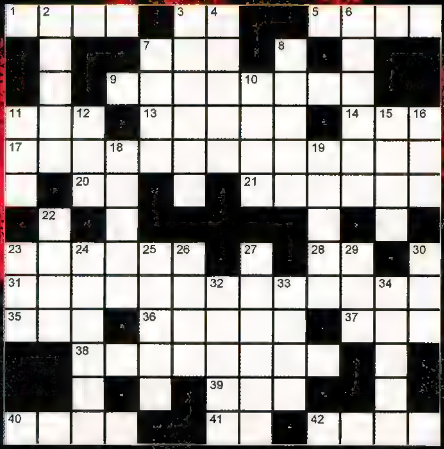
—*Seanbaby*

> "I couldn't pass up getting my fist near the mouth that shouted 'action' on the set of *House of the Dead*."



TURNING BACK TIME

(Solution on page 156)



ACROSS

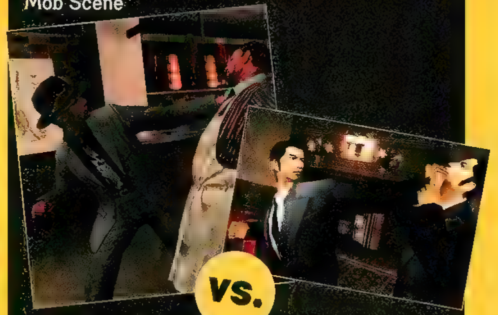
1. Pioneering paddle game
3. Famous Capcom 2D fighter, for short
5. *Rush 'N Attack* attack
7. Dreamcast's _-*Chu Rocket*
9. Snake wears one in the *Metal Gear Solid 2* intro
11. Genesis hoops title *NBA _*
13. *SmackDown!* grappler William
14. NES slugger _ *Baseball*
17. Mattel's old-school competition for Atari
20. *Gran Turismo 4*'s Beetle-maker
21. Former name of *MLB*'s Angels Stadium: _ Field
23. One of the tiny natives in *Rayman 2*
28. Alien movie turned crappy Atari game
31. Early PC flight series carried over to the SNES
35. Rockstar PS2 action title
36. Behave like intelligent A.I.?
37. *Pirates: The Legend of Black _*
38. Early arcade space shooter
39. Online chat abbreviation for "in reference to"
40. *Chrono Trigger* cloud city
41. Opposite of NW on a world map
42. PS2's _ *Night Beyond*

DOWN

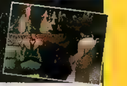
2. PS1 role-playing game *Star _*
3. Link's *Zelda* defense item
4. Like Mario's mushrooms?
5. Pioneering puzzler
7. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* star
8. *Metal Gear*'s Snake
11. Genesis earthworm
12. PS1 *Music Generator* affiliate
15. Instructions or strategy guide format
16. RPG stopover point
18. Patrick of 11 ACROSS
19. PS2 horror title
22. Alien blood vessel you might shoot in *Life Force*
23. Number of firearms you can carry in the original *Halo*
24. Upcoming 360 title *WarDevil: _*
25. *GUN* collectible
26. Aged *Lego Star Wars* Jedi
27. Shorter nickname for SNES *Star Wars* title
29. *Shrek* (Xbox) publisher
30. Early stage of graphics?
32. *Sims* developer
33. Walking assault vehicle of 27 DOWN
34. SNES RPG _-*bound*

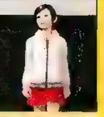
GRUDGE MATCH

Mob Scene



Someday maybe all organized crime will band together and unite against their common foes of law, order, and decency. Until then: Mobster Grudge Match!





	THE GODFATHER	YAKUZA
OUR HERO	Build your own mobster, porno 'stache and all **Advantage: Godfather**	Clean-cut guy with one suit to his name
COMBAT	Come out swinging with vintage fisticuffs! **Advantage: Tie**	Crack some skulls with a 10-speed or a butt-warm bar stool **Advantage: Tie**
STORY LINE	Just watch the original movie **Advantage: Godfather**	Lots of long, confusing Japanese names
FATALITY	47 ways to execute a fellah **Advantage: Godfather**	People don't die; they just learn a lesson and apologize
A DAY IN THE LIFE	Force respect with a drive-by	A mix of revenge, charity work, and erotic magazine shopping **Advantage: Yakuza**
IN YOUR SPARE TIME...	Extort police and rough up small-business owners **Advantage: Godfather**	Save a puppy and chill with an orphan girl

WINNER: THE GODFATHER

***Yakuza* may have introduced our Wild Western culture to the exotic ass-kicking of the East, but when it comes to crime, extortion, and delicious cannoli, nobody commits the hit like the gangsters from *The Godfather*.**

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MIA (Missing In America)

Four foreign systems that skipped our shores

It's not unusual to hear gamers say things like, "Man, Japan gets all the cool stuff." And it's true—a lot of fab foreign games never make it to the U.S. Still, it's one thing to miss out on a limited edition box set or something, but what about when entire systems fail to make it across the Pacific? Some major Japanese consoles have never shown up in the States...but it could be that the grass really isn't greener over there after all.

—Jeremy Parish

MSX

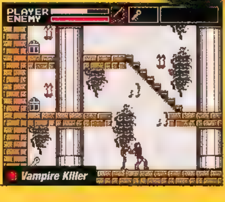
Xbox, meet dad (1983)

Say wha? The Xbox was not Microsoft's first console venture. Nor was Dreamcast's WinCe operating system. No, Mr. Gates' first foray into the console arena happened more than 20 years ago, hand-in-hand with current nemesis Sony. Sounds like madness? It's not. The MSX wasn't precisely a console, either...it was more like a computer that could play cartridge-based games. And more than a dozen companies banded together to create their own versions of home hardware based on the MS Basic-derived MSX spec. Though it never made it here, the MSX was a major success in Japan, enough to compete with the Famicom (aka NES). And some major series (*Metal Gear* and *Dragon Quest*) made their first appearance on the MSX.

MIA: So why didn't MSX make it to the U.S.? Though the standard was conceived by a Microsoft executive, it was a Japanese initiative. In America, the company supported the IBM PC standard.

Major games: *Puyo Puyo*, *Vampire Killer* (*Castlevania*), *Ys*, *Dragon Quest*, *Metal Gear*

Did we miss out?
It's very possible the presence of a Microsoft-backed system could have made a huge impact in America's early, fragmented PC market.



Vampire Killer

X68000

The PC that played like a console (1987)

Say wha? The follow-up to Sharp's X1 console, the X68000, was built around the same Motorola 68000 chip that appeared in the Macintosh, Amiga, and Genesis. That meant it had a dazzlingly uncreative name, but its prodigious gaming capabilities more than made up for it.

MIA: The X68000 also had a dazzling price, or perhaps, simply dizzying: nearly $4,000. About par for a PC of that era, but just a *little bit* pricey next to the Genesis.

Major games: *Strider*, *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, *Castlevania*

Did we miss out? X68000 offered some of the best-looking arcade conversions ever seen—but very few unique titles. The system's most notorious "original" title, an impressive total remake of *Castlevania*, appeared in an enhanced form on PlayStation a few years back.

Strider

PC-FX

Defacing memories (1994)

Say wha? The follow-up to NEC's excellent TurboGrafx-16 was neither excellent nor turbo. Overpriced, undersized, and underpowered—it launched in Japan at the same time as the vastly superior PlayStation—PC-FX quickly degenerated into a breeding ground for crappy anime and porn games.

MIA: PC-FX never came to America, and all evidence points to the fact that it sucked hard as the primary reason it never made its way over here.

Major games: *Dragon Knight 4*, *Der Langrisser*

Did we miss out? Not at all. The PC-FX had very little to offer anyone who wasn't turned on by hot anime action.

Der Langrisser

WonderSwan

Ugly Duckling (1999)

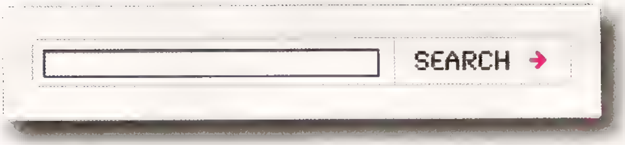
Say wha? Looking a little like a bar of soap, WonderSwan was the final creation of Game Boy designer Gunpei Yokoi. It was designed to compete with Nintendo's behemoth on price...and felt it—the plastics were flimsy, the sound was horrid, and the black-and-white screen was somehow even blurrier than the original GB's. Of course, as a Bandai project, it was glutted with poorly made games about anime.

MIA: After Neo Geo Pocket took a vicious beating at the hands of Nintendo, Bandai likely realized the WonderSwan wasn't worth chancing in the U.S.

Major games: *Final Fantasy IV*, *Blue Wing Blitz*, *Arc the Lad*, *Rockman & Forte* (*Mega Man & Bass*)

Did we miss out? Actually, once the WonderSwan went technicolor (and Square hopped aboard) it turned into a decent system. The revamped *Final Fantasy* ports made it to the U.S. on GBA, though, so you didn't miss much.

Rockman & Forte



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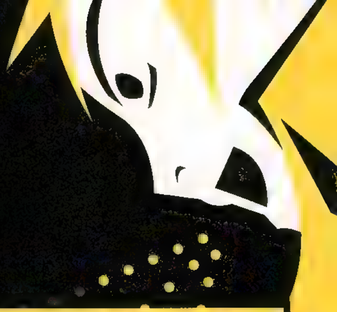
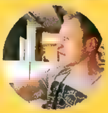


FINAL WORD

The final say on Final Fantasy

By their nature, *Final Fantasy* fans tend to be a rather hardcore lot, with very clear-cut opinions about the gory details of gaming's premiere role-playing-game series. We had the two biggest *FF* nuts at the office face off on the subject....

	 Jeremy Parish **1UP.com Features Editor**	 **Shane Bettenhausen** **Executive Editor**
This year, Square Enix announced three *Final Fantasy XIII* games. Do we really need all those?	**NO:** "Yoshinori Kitase and Tetsuya Nomura, the directors behind the *FFXIII* projects, have really been off their game lately—their abysmal "Compilation of *FFVII*" content we've seen so far doesn't speak well for *FFXIII*. The *Dragon Quest* crew takes a much more reserved approach to spin-offs, which yields great results (see *Rocket Slime*, last issue's Game of the Month); maybe the *FF* guys could learn from their example."	**SURE:** "Although I agree that the *FFVII* offshoots sucked, I'm still hopeful for the *FFXIII* games. *XIII* proper looks absolutely gorgeous, and Kitase promises a return to the traditional *FF* battle system after *FFXII*'s adventurous (yet ultimately flawed) combat experiment. The jury's still out on *Versus XIII*, the cell-phone game, and any other cash-in that Square Enix might announce, though. I do want to make it to *FFXIV* by 2009."
Which film forced you to reexamine your fandom more: *Spirits Within* or *Advent Children*?	**SPIRITS WITHIN:** "That was series creator Hironobu Sakaguchi's baby, but it completely lacked everything good about the games. *Advent Children* was worse than I expected, true, but it's not like I had high hopes for it to begin with. *FFVII* was a self-contained story, and all these needless sequels just chip away at what little goodwill I still have for the game."	**BOTH:** "God, they're both cinematic disasters. Yet, I still feel sorry for *Spirits Within*—it's a visually stunning, surprisingly heartfelt flick that, in many ways, touched on all the central themes of *FFVII*. Too bad it had the dialogue and acting of a Sci-Fi Channel original. Sakaguchi really should have sought more assistance...he simply wasn't a filmmaker. As for *Advent Children*...it's pretty, but utterly dull and unnecessary."
What's the best *Final Fantasy* of all time?	**FFV:** "You mean, besides *FFXII*? Probably *Final Fantasy V*—I love the nuts-and-bolts character tinkering of *FF Tactics*, and *FFV* offers the same depth within the context of a "real" *FF* game. Unfortunately, I've only completed it once; the official US version (in *FF Anthology* for the PlayStation) was poorly translated and seriously buggy. Once *FFV Advance* is out, my answer will be different!"	**FFIV:** "*FFXII*? Not so much. But I'll give you props for picking *FFV*—I've always adored its job system. But for me, the race for first boils down to *FFIV* (represented a pivotal leap forward in terms of story, character, and depth), *FFVII* (for its amazing production values and mature story line), and *FFX* (offers the series' deepest, best battle system). It's a tough choice, but the sweet, musty aroma of nostalgia gives *FFIV* the edge."
What's the worst *Final Fantasy* of all time?	**FFII:** "Discounting the awful spin-offs like *Dirge of Cerberus* and *Mystic Quest*, I'd have to go with *FFII*. (The 8-bit Japanese *FFII*, not the Super NES one—that's *FFIV*.) It's the one *FF* game I haven't finished, because I just don't hate myself that much. Clearly, Square themselves agreed, because it quickly quarantined *FFII* creator Akitoshi Kawazu's crazy gameplay ideas in the *SaGa* series."	**FFXI:** "Yeah, *FFII* is terribly busted. Seriously, a game where you need to attack your own party members in order to gain more hit points? What a mess. If I had to strike one game from the record, though, it would be *FFXI*. While I understand that this massively multiplayer online game has many loyal players, I find the whole thing tedious and unwieldy. It really should not have been included in the proper, numbered *FF* series."
What's the most overrated *Final Fantasy* of all time?	**FFVII:** "Do you even have to ask? *Final Fantasy VII* was a revolution in presentation, but a huge step back in terms of gameplay. And even the once-impressive graphics kind of suck now. Unfortunately, it was the first *FF* game most people played—the first role-playing game, even—so it shaped their perceptions of what the series and genre are about. It's OK, everyone. You're forgiven...."	**IT'S A TIE:** "Bah! *FFVII*'s 3D/2D mash-up visuals might look totally bizarre today...but it was a watershed moment for the series and, ultimately, the role-playing genre as a whole. Its impact hasn't diminished one bit. Personally, I consider *FFVI* and *FFIX* to be the most overrated. Both games populate their adventuring parties with unlikable freaks, and both quests completely collapse about three-fourths of the way through."

> "*FFVII* was a revolution in presentation, but a huge step back in terms of gameplay."

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CUE THOSE SPACE MONKS

F***ING HALO 3!

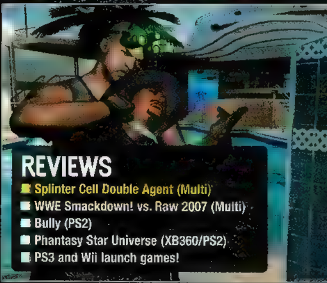
So you just finished reading all about *Gears of War*, the Xbox 360's "*Halo*" for 2006. So, wait...does that mean *Halo 3* will be the Xbox 360's "*Gears of War* for 2007"? (Don't think about it too hard—you'll get a migraine.) We head to *Halo*-series makers Bungie for the first real blowout of their gigantically anticipated first-person shooter. Trust us—we're as excited as you are.

But *Halo 3* isn't the only thing that's got us agog. We're also putting together **launch guides for both the PlayStation 3 and the Wii**. Find out which games are worth getting first—provided you have any money left after some SOB gouges you for the systems on eBay. But it's always better to receive than to give, right? So build your ultimate wish list with our **annual holiday gift guide**, filled with the game gear that'll make you salivate—or at least go, "WTF?"

Oh, and you'll notice a few changes around here, too. Next issue marks the debut of ***EGM*'s new design**. You'll find a new look, new sections, expanded reviews, and much more. It's been months in the making, and we're proud of the new format. We can't wait to show you the new *EGM*. Oh yeah, and *Halo 3*, which many are calling 2007's *Gears of War*, which for those keeping score was 2006's *Halo*. Anyone got any Excedrin?

PREVIEWS

- Devil May Cry 4 (PS3)
- Blue Dragon (XB360)
- Cipher Complex (PS3/XB360)
- Final Fantasy XIII (PS3)
- Super Mario Galaxy (Wii)



REVIEWS

- Splinter Cell Double Agent (Multi)
- WWE Smackdown! vs. Raw 2007 (Multi)
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- Phantasy Star Universe (XB360/PS2)
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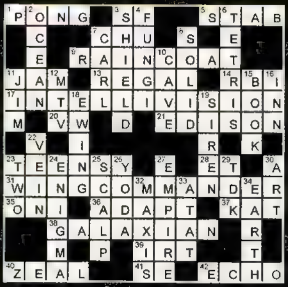

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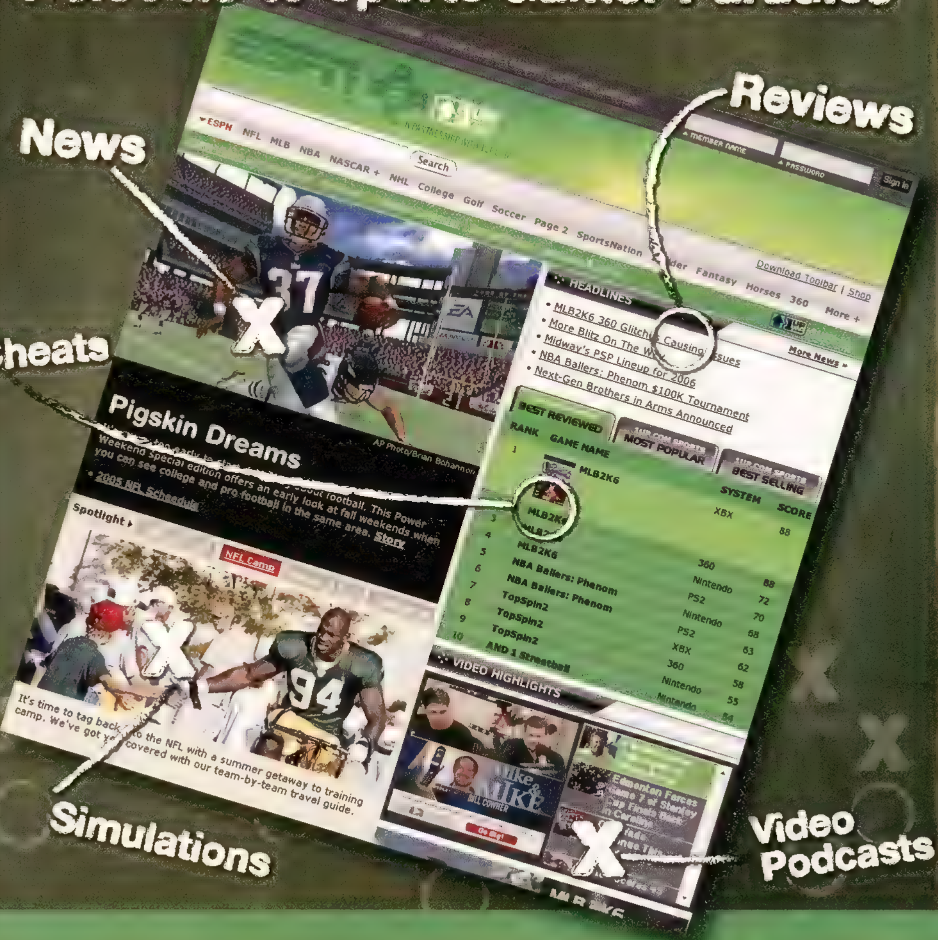

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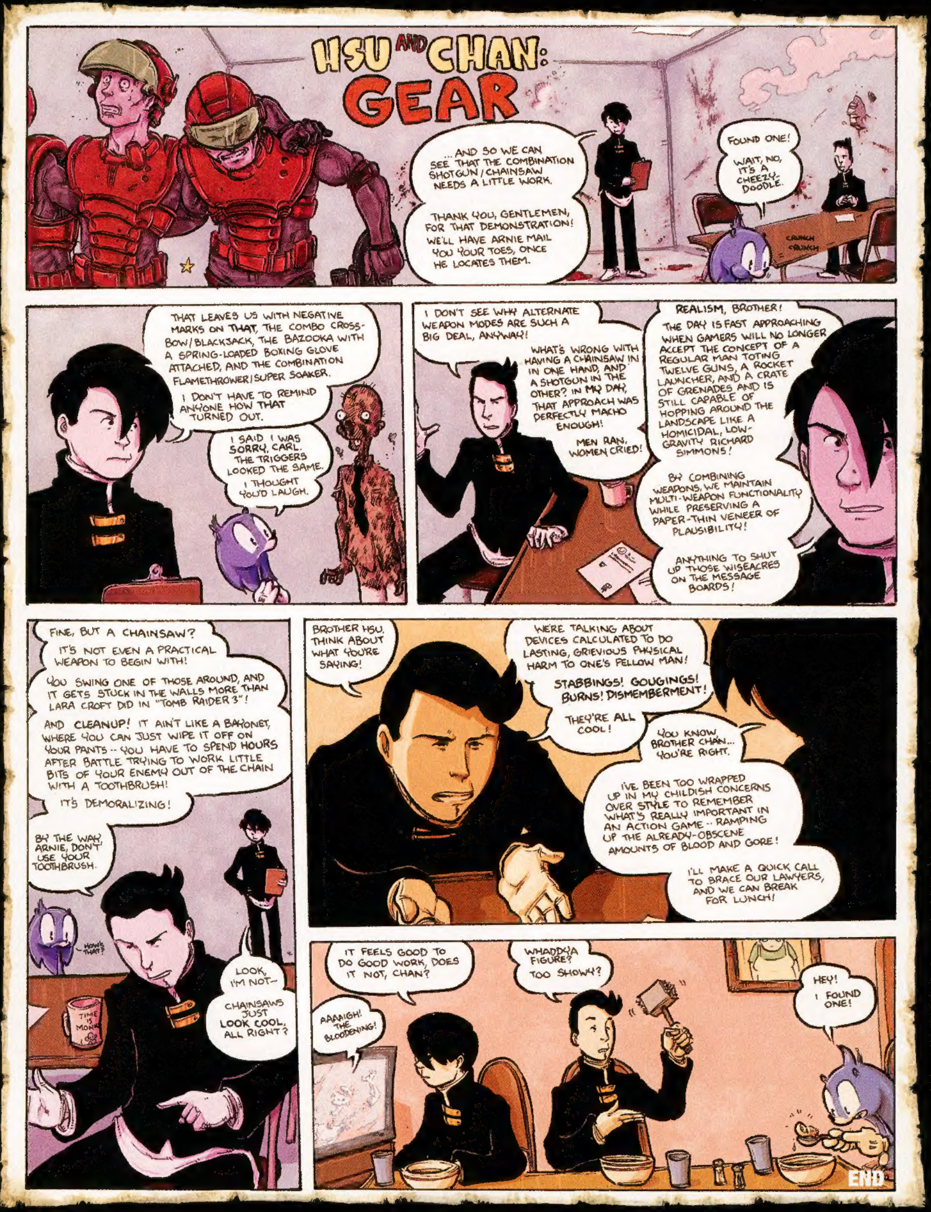
HSU AND CHAN: GEAR
...AND SO WE CAN SEE THAT THE COMBINATION SHOTGUN / CHAINSAW NEEDS A LITTLE WORK.
THANK YOU, GENTLEMEN, FOR THAT DEMONSTRATION! WE'LL HAVE ARNIE MAIL YOU YOUR TOES, ONCE HE LOCATES THEM.
FOUND ONE!
WAIT, NO, IT'S A CHEEZY-DOODLE.
CRUNCH CRUNCH
THAT LEAVES US WITH NEGATIVE MARKS ON THAT, THE COMBO CROSSBOW / BLACKJACK, THE BAZOOKA WITH A SPRING-LOADED BOXING GLOVE ATTACHED, AND THE COMBINATION FLAMETHROWER / SUPER SOAKER.
I DON'T HAVE TO REMIND ANYONE HOW THAT TURNED OUT.
I SAID I WAS SORRY, CARL. THE TRIGGERS LOOKED THE SAME. I THOUGHT YOU'D LAUGH.
I DON'T SEE WHY ALTERNATE WEAPON MODES ARE SUCH A BIG DEAL, ANYWAY!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH HAVING A CHAINSAW IN ONE HAND, AND A SHOTGUN IN THE OTHER? IN MY DAY, THAT APPROACH WAS PERFECTLY MACHO ENOUGH!
MEN RAN, WOMEN CRIED!
REALISM, BROTHER!
THE DAY IS FAST APPROACHING WHEN GAMERS WILL NO LONGER ACCEPT THE CONCEPT OF A REGULAR MAN TOTING TWELVE GUNS, A ROCKET LAUNCHER, AND A CRATE OF GRENADES AND IS STILL CAPABLE OF HOPPING AROUND THE LANDSCAPE LIKE A HOMICIDAL, LOW-GRAVITY RICHARD SIMMONS!
BY COMBINING WEAPONS, WE MAINTAIN MULTI-WEAPON FUNCTIONALITY WHILE PRESERVING A PAPER-THIN VENEER OF PLAUSIBILITY!
ANYTHING TO SHUT UP THOSE WISEACRES ON THE MESSAGE BOARDS!
FINE, BUT A CHAINSAW?
IT'S NOT EVEN A PRACTICAL WEAPON TO BEGIN WITH!
YOU SWING ONE OF THOSE AROUND, AND IT GETS STUCK IN THE WALLS MORE THAN LARA CROFT DID IN "TOMB RAIDER 3"!
AND CLEANUP! IT AIN'T LIKE A BAYONET, WHERE YOU CAN JUST WIPE IT OFF ON YOUR PANTS -- YOU HAVE TO SPEND HOURS AFTER BATTLE TRYING TO WORK LITTLE BITS OF YOUR ENEMY OUT OF THE CHAIN WITH A TOOTHBRUSH!
IT'S DEMORALIZING!
BY THE WAY, ARNIE, DON'T USE YOUR TOOTHBRUSH.
HOW'S THAT?
TIME IS MONK
LOOK, I'M NOT—
CHAINSAWS JUST LOOK COOL, ALL RIGHT?
BROTHER HSU, THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING!
WE'RE TALKING ABOUT DEVICES CALCULATED TO DO LASTING, GRIEVIOUS PHYSICAL HARM TO ONE'S FELLOW MAN!
STABBINGS! GOUGINGS! BURNS! DISMEMBERMENT!
THEY'RE ALL COOL!
YOU KNOW, BROTHER CHAN... YOU'RE RIGHT.
I'VE BEEN TOO WRAPPED UP IN MY CHILDISH CONCERNS OVER STYLE TO REMEMBER WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT IN AN ACTION GAME -- RAMPING UP THE ALREADY-OBSCENE AMOUNTS OF BLOOD AND GORE!
I'LL MAKE A QUICK CALL TO BRACE OUR LAWYERS, AND WE CAN BREAK FOR LUNCH!
IT FEELS GOOD TO DO GOOD WORK, DOES IT NOT, CHAN?
WHADDYA FIGURE? TOO SHOWY?
AAAAIGH! THE BLOODENING!
HEY! I FOUND ONE!
END

Pictured from left to right: LCDR Mark Simon, ETCM Eric Olis, BMC Dan Ames, BM1 Michael O'Connell, EN1 Jason Fetterman, EM2 Mark DiPietro, LT Lewis Baker, MM2 Sergio Rodriguez

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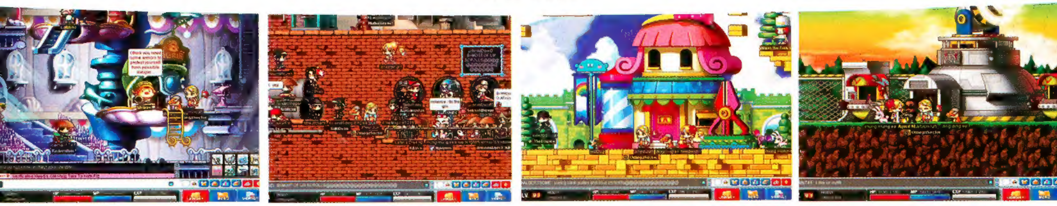

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Team BLINK Champions!

Hundreds of units participated in this year's *Team BLINK Challenge.*

FASTEST AVERAGE TIMES

Cub Scout Division	
#1 - Pack 89	Kennett, MO
#2 - Pack 15	Broadalbin, NY
#3 - Pack 31	Charlestown, NH
Boy Scout Division	
#1 - Troop 236	Hurricane, WV
#2 - Troop 347	St. Augustine, FL
#3 - Troop 620	Salmon, ID
Venturing Division	
#1 Crew 52	Deerfield, IL
#2 F1ght3rs	San Jose, CA
#3 Crew 515	Tracy, CA
Girl Scout Division	
#1 GS Troop 4609	Moundsville, WV
#2 GS Troop 1846	Chicago, IL
#3 GS Troop 27	Gaylord, MI
Camp Division	
#1 Camp Tesomas	Rhinelander, WI
#2 Camp V-Bar	Perkinston, MS
#3 Scout Camp	San Antonio, TX

MOST TOTAL POINTS

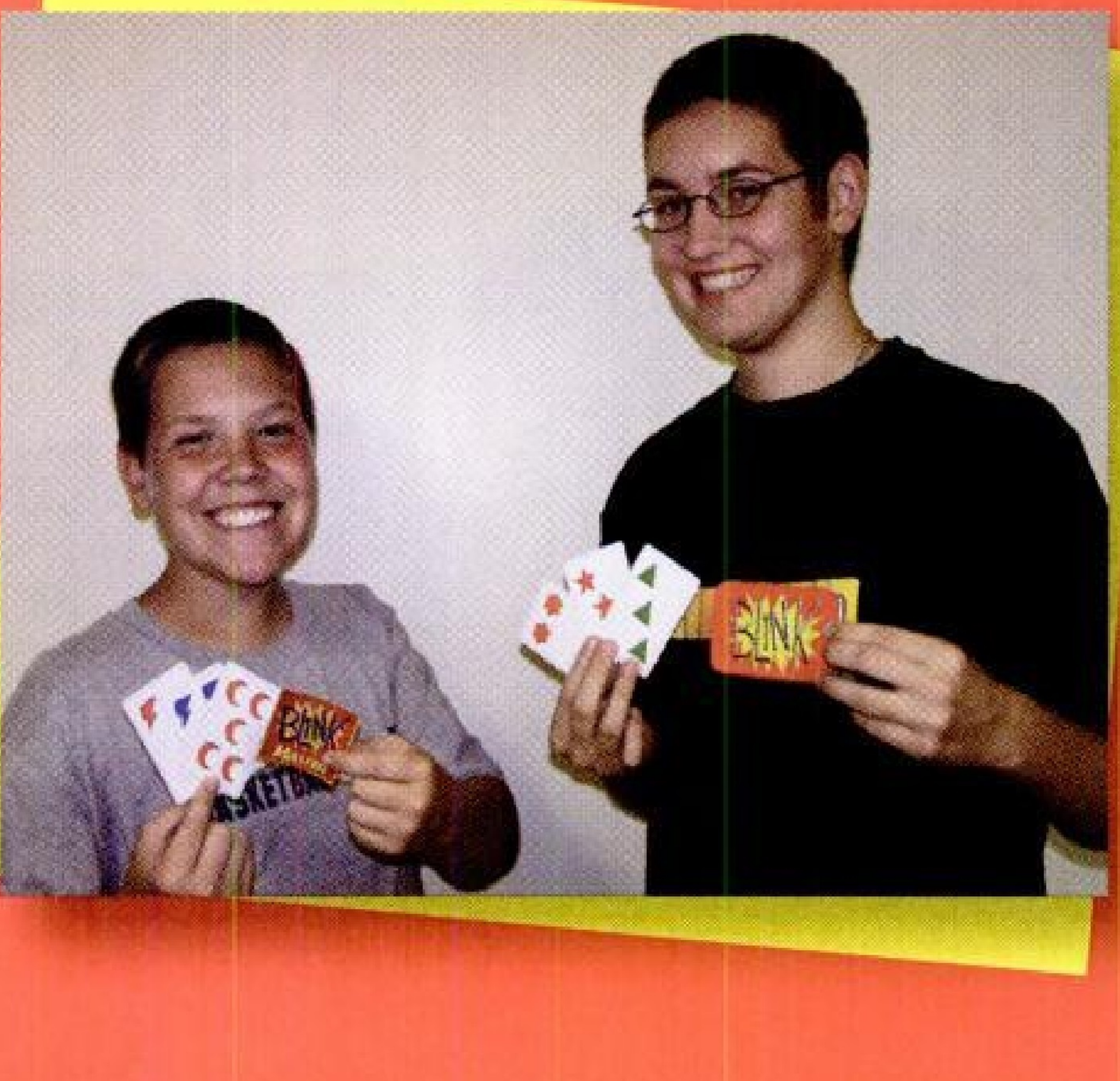
Cub Scout Division	
#1 - Pack 15	Broadalbin, NY
#2 - Pack 411	San Jose, CA
#3 - Pack 92	East Troy, WI
Boy Scout Division	
#1 - Troop 239	Claridge, PA
#2 - Troop 540	Madison, NC
#3 - Troop 740	Fayetteville, NC
Venturing Division	
#1 Crew 540	Madison, NC
#2 Crew 515	Tracy, CA
#3 Crew 473	Flushing NY
Girl Scout Division	
#1 GS Troop 1846	Chicago, IL
#2 GS Troop 4609	Moundsville, WV
#3 GS Troop 151	Palmdale, CA
Camp Division	
#1 Camp Tesomas	Rhinelander, WI
#2 Scout Camp	San Antonio, TX
#2 Camp V-Bar *(A tie for #2)*	Perkinston, MS

Top three units from each division are above!

Out of the Box Publishing would like to thank Scouting, adult volunteers, and the players for participating in this year's ***Team BLINK Challenge!***

Keep playing! *BLINK* players can still get timed and rated. The fun continues with the **Team *BLINK* Open.** Units already signed-up may continue to record times and keep working on achieving the Master Level patches!

New units may sign-up for the Team *BLINK* Open at www.teamblinkopen.com.



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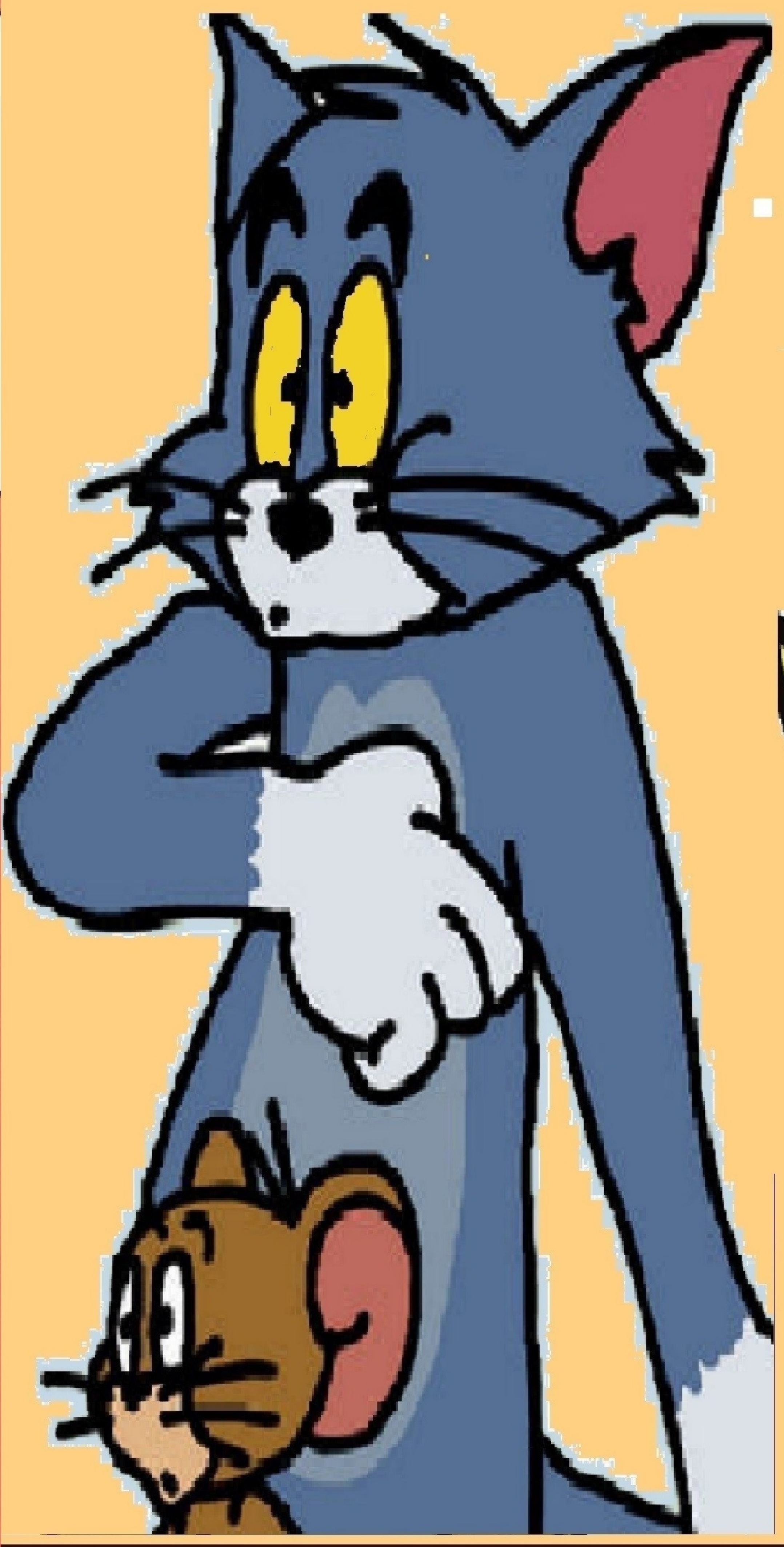

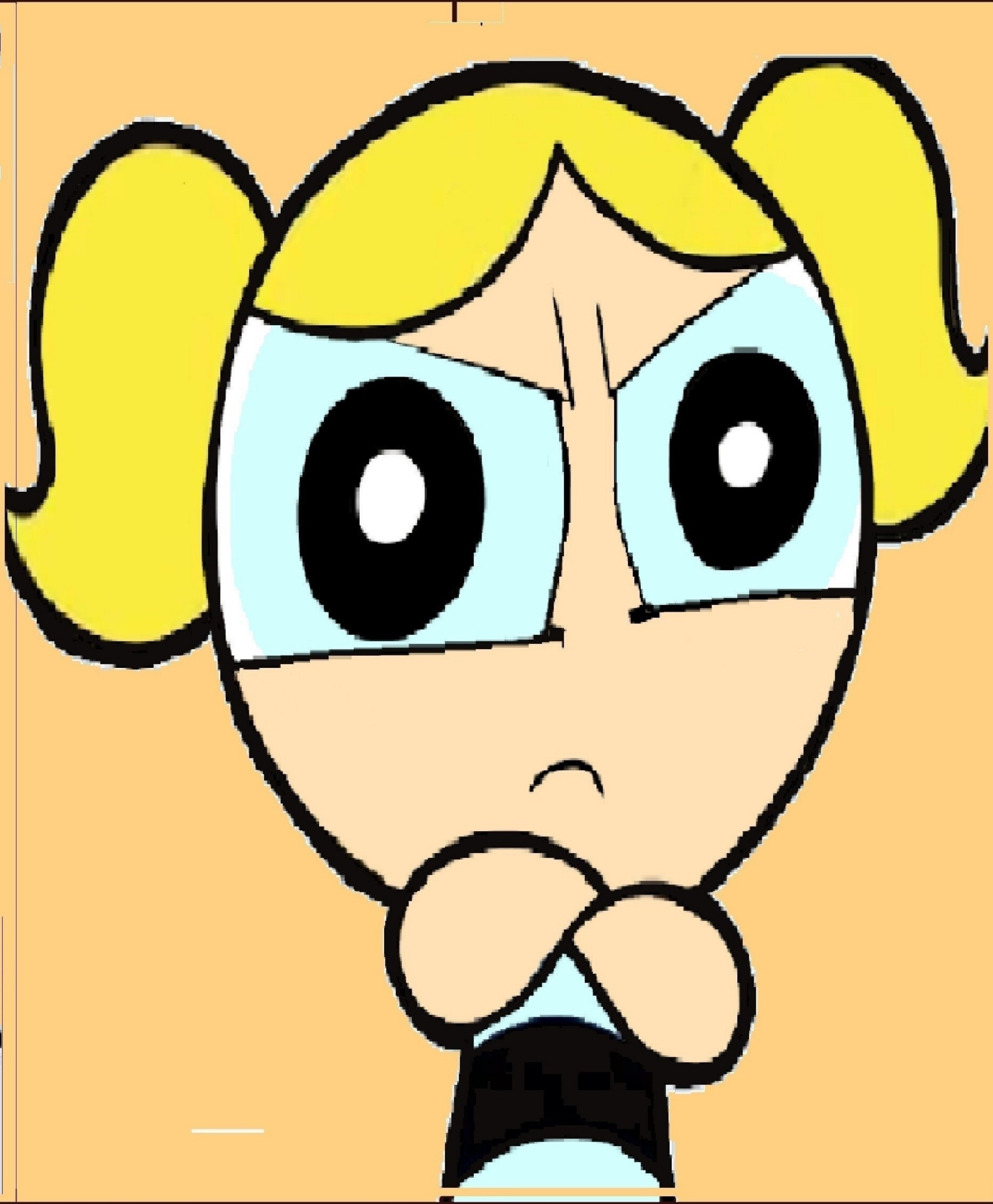

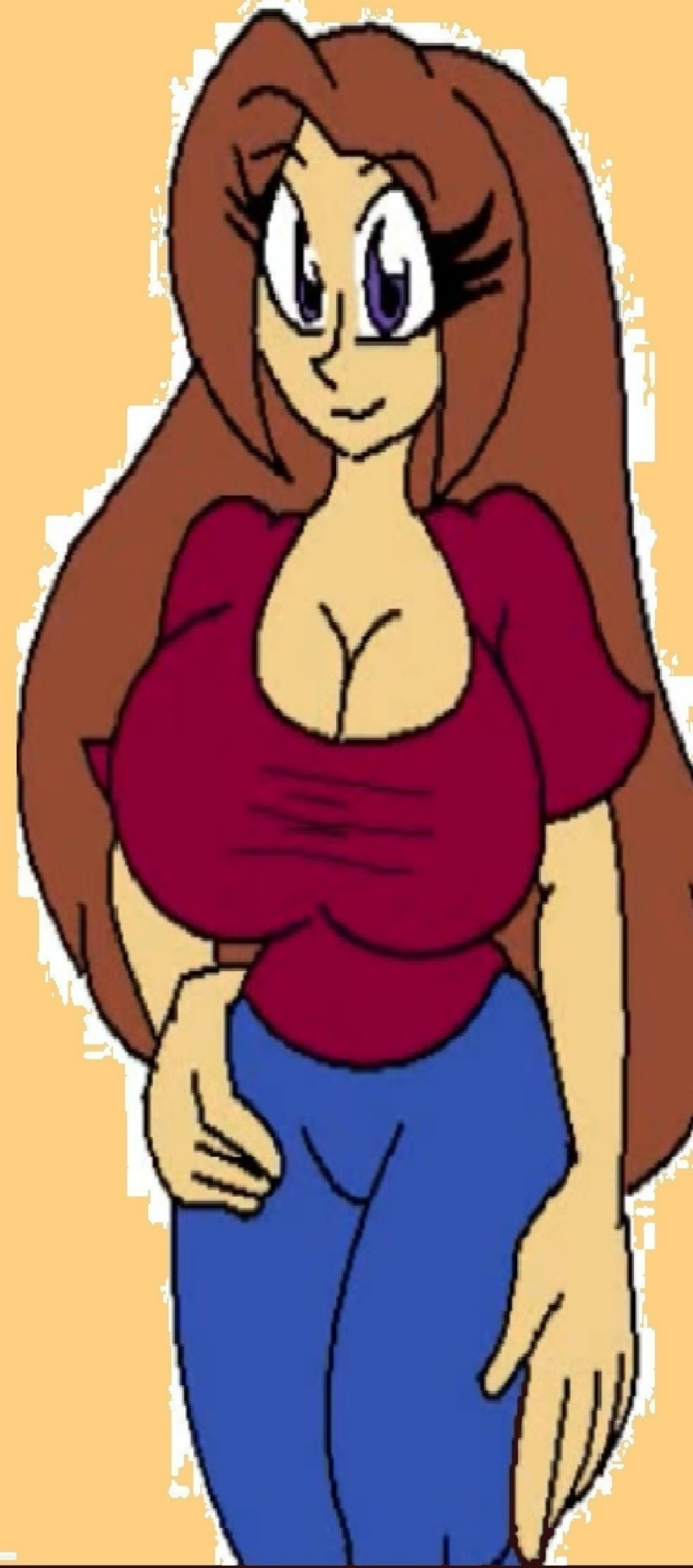

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Galaxian
Dig Dug
Pole Position 2
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